



National Center for Technology Innovation
Advancing Technology Innovations for All Students

NCTI 2007 Innovator's Conference

Date: Thursday, November 15, 2007
Presenter: Jim Fruchterman, Benetech, Chairman and Founder
Session Title: Keynote Address

Recognized in 2006 as a John D. and Catherine T. [MacArthur Fellow](#), Jim gave a rousing keynote address that exemplified how bright ideas can truly become real solutions. In college, he wondered how to repurpose defense optical recognition technology to have social benefits. The result was the Arkenstone Reading Machine, a solution that applied optical character recognition to digital print and made text readers a PC-based, home solution for people with visual impairments all over the world. A following bright idea came from napster – the music sharing site – where Jim saw the power of the social group to provide and create digital content. [Bookshare.org](#) was the result, a solution that leverages the passion and ongoing work to scan books to be read by screen readers. The Bookshare.org library now boasts over 35,000 books in the library and a [new grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSEP) to make the service subscription-free; another expansion is recently-granted permission by publishers to go global. Another bright idea was born in the great need of human rights workers documenting abuses to maintain accurate and secure databases. [Benetech](#) developed an open source solution called [Martus](#) (Greek for "witness") that is a simple, web-based data entry interface that can be used by field workers to gather and store encrypted information for safe documentation. In a "futures moment", Jim shared that he and Gregg Vanderheiden at the [University of Wisconsin Trace Center](#) are working on a project called *Raising the Floor* with the express goal of providing basic access to assistive technology via cell phones in an extremely inexpensive delivery system.

These and other innovations demonstrate Jim's drive and vision as a social entrepreneur and his model of looking to technology innovators to change the world.

Key questions from the audience included:

Question 1: *What are we learning internationally?*

Response: Bangladesh will have better Internet access than the United States. It's not that the US doesn't have the technologies; it's that we have business and social barriers to overcome. We can look to other countries to do so. For example, a partnership with Argentina can help to acquire books of Spanish literature for ELL students in California.

Question 2: *As you bring people together, how do we communicate or where does communication break down?*

Response: Terminology barriers are huge. In the business sector, the consumer is always assumed to be right, but the sense of the customer in the social sector is often not as respectful as in business. Linguistic knowledge barriers are huge; social sector people get told business is the only model. Businesses should not assume that the social sector is any less sophisticated in conceptualization or delivery.

Question 3: *It's a surprise to us about how little people know about open source and portable technology.*

Response: The problem with open source is that it's mainly "geeks" serving "other geeks." Geeks are not the users. We need to understand needs of consumer, engage customers, and offer to share code. Part of "raising the floor" is developing lots of open source technology.



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Question 4: *Is there a way to cover other media because Chafee only covers text?*

Response: Chafee is not as specific as you might think. You can include images. Their plan is that within a week of getting a [NIMAS](#) file, you will have a DAISY file. In 2009, we will add image descriptions to graphics. How about video? Try to get publishers to cooperate. If it doesn't work, get the advocacy community to go back to Congress.

Watch the video and be inspired! (coming soon)