

YOU have the
awesome ability
to make **POSITIVE** changes
to the lives **of people**
all over **the world**
via personal interaction
through podcasts
(and other social media tools)

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Hi, my name is Daniele Rossi and I have a podcast called *Stuttering is Cool* (www.stutteringiscool). As you might have guessed, I stutter. It was social media that kick started me into acceptance. Specifically— it was through interacting with other stutterers on forums, Twitter and listening to other people stutter like I do on podcasts and Skype.

This ebook is all about how, just as the title says, YOU have the awesome ability to make positive changes to the lives of people all over the world via personal interaction through podcasts and other social media tools! Key phrase: personal interaction. Social media is simply a channel of communication. A multi—way dialogue.

FUN FACT!

This ebook was originally a presentation I gave at PodCamp London* 2009, Podcasters Across Borders 2009 and PodCamp Montréal. Though I make references to podcasting throughout, the contents herein are applicable to all social media tools.

* London, Ontario, Canada

Stuttering is Cool is an open mic podcast for stutterers. Stutterers call in or email me an mp3 which I play “on the air”. In turn, other stutterers hear them and we all feel less alone in our stuttering. Less alone in our stuttering? Yes, it tends to be really rare to meet other stutterers in your geographical area.

I learned something amazing while producing my podcast and interacting with listeners. And that is ➡ YOU have the awesome ability to make positive changes to the lives of people all over the world via personal interaction through your podcast and other social media tools! (yes, I know I already wrote that).

I’ll be using my podcast as a case study in this ebook.

First, a quick description of what it feels like to grow up with a stutter

It tends to suck. It's rare to meet other stutterers in your geographical area. Further, stuttering is misunderstood. Friends and family members usually can't relate (unless, of course, if they themselves stutter). Heck, even speech therapists don't fully understand stuttering!



TODAY I'M GOING
TO TEACH YOU
HOW TO TALK
LIKE A ROBOT

Stuttering is isolating. Stutterers get bullied, skipped over in school and sometimes mislabeled and put in special education classes. It sucks even further if you let stuttering control

your life. Instead, you try to use nicknames or beat around the bush. Unfortunately, with all the social punishment and embarrassing moments which come with stuttering, it's quite difficult not to let it take control.

WHAT'S THE MATTER,
YOU DON'T EVEN
KNOW YOUR OWN
NAME??



In many ways, I grew up alone in my stuttering. So I tried to beat my stuttering by using little tricks. These are referred to as “avoidances” like, say, if you tend to stutter on the name of the city where you live, you won't say it's actual name. It makes for really embarrassing experiences for those of us who stutter on our own names.

At first I was alone, but not anymore. Thanks to the affordability and the ubiquity of the Internet, hardware (such as webcams), computers and popular (sometimes free) software which require little-to-no technical knowledge, stutterers can form friendships with other stutterers beyond their geographical area. And speak to and see them online. It's also a great way to meet other stutterers in your geographical area.

And what an awesome experience it is when stutterers meet each other. An instant bond forms as you share common experiences. Someone else experiences the same thing?!

Suddenly, you're not alone in your stuttering anymore. And it's beginning to suck a little less.

Maybe *you* don't stutter, dear reader. Think about an experience in your life of which your friends and family probably cannot relate. Perhaps you have a child who is anaphylactic and only feel truly understood by other parents in the same situation. Maybe you've gone

through a break-up or a divorce. Or a family member has been diagnosed with an illness. I've read that veterans of war never talk about their experiences except only to other veterans.

Wouldn't it be great to have a friend who experienced the exact same thing as you?

What does all this have to do with social media?

Social media gives you the ability to tap into the knowledge of a worldwide population with like-minded people sharing similar interests and experiences. This is truly a multi-way, global conversation. A club. A support group. Your peeps. It's a fantastic medium for knowledge sharing and mentoring.

Altogether now... YOU have the awesome ability

BUZZWORDS

- ➡ peer-to-peer
- ➡ crowdsourcing
- ➡ user-driven innovation

to make positive changes to the lives of people all over the world via personal interaction through your podcast and other social media tools!

Never, ever underestimate your idea

Whatever you're thinking of doing online— podcast, blog, Twitter, Facebook page, whatever- never, ever underestimate your idea. It doesn't matter which tool you use, they all do the same thing- they let you communicate with other people who, altogether now, share your interests and experiences.

A great thing about social media is it doesn't cost much to try your idea. Tools are cheap and mostly free! Even webhosting can be really affordable (until your site gets popular but that's another ebook). So chances are, your idea WILL work because niche topics rule cyberspace!

I never imagined my podcast would last beyond four episodes when I launched it. *Stutterers willing to openly stutter in a public forum?*

It's a good thing I gave my podcast idea a try. I was recording episode 49 of Stuttering is Cool at the time of my presentation at PodCamp London. Presentation? ME? A stutterer who was always

Niche markets and **The Long Tail**

Using television as an example, it has to broadcast content which appeals to as much of the population as possible. It's astronomically expensive to make a tv show and run a tv station. The Internet is cheap enough to let anyone broadcast their own content about whatever they like. With so many people on the planet with access to the Internet, you're bound to attract an audience who shares your interests and experience. Like-minded people find each other. You post content and people come to you. And you go to other content posted on the web. 500 TV channels may seem like a lot, and each of these stations tries to remain profitable with content that appeals to everyone. But they cast their net so big that they actually catch less and less. Conversely, there are millions of websites covering everything you could ever be interested in.



covert about his stuttering and thought would never, ever try public speaking? I learned so much about stuttering from chatting with fellow stutterers, that I doubt my monumental event would have ever happened. Through online interaction with fellow stutterers, I learned that stuttering is not my fault. The speech therapy I had growing up was ineffective and also, there is no cure for stuttering. I learned as well through experience that the best way for living with your stuttering is through acceptance and sharing your experience with other stutterers. Preferably in person but online tools provide the next best thing.

Otherwise, stuttering will rob you of life choices. From keeping quiet or avoiding social events to underemployment, loneliness, and in some cases, even suicide. Without acceptance, many stutterers feel their stuttering is a curse that controls and hinders their lives. The challenge with stuttering is even with acceptance, you have to deal with social punishment and isolation. The stuttering phenomenon is mysterious and riddled with

negative stereotypes.

See why building a supportive community is effective towards self-help? And people think social media is an unproductive waste of time.

Now think back to your own unique emotional experience... What if you built an online community around that? While you may be a super mega minority, social media makes niche groups accessible to everyone around the world with an Internet connection. The knowledge sharing enables everyone to contribute back into society. And as they say, quality of life increases as you find meaning and fulfillment by helping others reach their goals. Speaking of which...

Build a Supportive Community

Traditional media producers tend to keep a relative distance from its audience. Social Media doesn't (when done properly). Like I wrote earlier, it allows for a multi-way dialogue. Use that ability to be approachable to your listeners. Encourage the building of a supportive

MY EPIPHANY:

I came home one Saturday night at 1 A.M. in the early days of my podcast. Because I'm a nerd, I turned on my computer. IM was open and one of my listeners contacted me. He was in first year post-secondary school and told me that he was nervous about having to give an oral presentation in front of his class the following week. I gave him advice, shared stories from my own experience and then the topic eventually lead to girls and stuttering.

I logged off an hour later and realized the significance.

My listener was in a different time zone. We never met in person. One stutterer was helping another stutterer. Over IM. Above and beyond speech therapy. This is important. Speech therapy only provides stutterers techniques for controlling stuttering as best as possible. With the advent of affordable computers, affordable Internet access, affordable recording gear, affordable web hosting and free software requiring little or no technical knowledge, mentorship between stutterers transcends geographical boundaries. It's no longer a rarity to meet another stutterer online.

I experienced this as often as I got to know more listeners and made friendships over various social media playgrounds. I've made contact with listeners in areas with no speech therapists or even a word for stuttering in their native language.

This is the power of social media. This is the power of the Internet and initiatives such as bringing laptops to school children in developing nations. In other words, you're building a tribe based on a shared life experience.

community of like-minded people sharing the same vision and principles.

Greg, my fellow stuttering friend and I formed an online stuttering community on Twitter where conversation happens in near-real time. This makes it a great online self-help group! And a great place to form friendships.

CASE STUDY

A fellow stuttrer from Glasgow had an upcoming job interview and asked for tips on how to prevent himself from stuttering. Greg and I explained there's no cure for stuttering. We gave our friend advice on how to control his stuttering and being upfront about it to his interviewer.

ANOTHER CASE STUDY

Learning happens outside the classroom, too

Greg is a stuttering researcher and professor with a lot of University students studying speech therapy following him on Twitter. Remember how I said

even speech therapists don't understand stuttering? By interacting with a research scientist on Twitter, students stay updated on the latest findings in real time. Because it's social media, conversations in our stuttering community aren't exclusive to Twitter. Conversation eventually moves from asynchronous (Twitter) onto real time synchronous forms like voice chat (Skype). **Social media develops relationships and friendships are formed.**

FUN FACT!

Voice and video chat software like Skype lets stutterers both hear and see other stutterers as well as practice and coach each other's speech therapy. Nothing beats meeting in person but this is the next best thing! The deaf community was WAY ahead of the curve. They've been using digital technology (video chat rooms) as a social platform for years!

Choose the tool based on your audience

It's important to try the tools your

peeps may already be comfortable using. In fact, “older” technologies, such as forums, are still in use and can be effective. As long as it’s appropriate to your audience. Social media provides an unlimited opportunity for creativity!

So never, never, never, never underestimate your idea! Never!*

Also, never forget that it’s not about you (and never was)

And never forget that your listeners started listening (or reading) because you share the same interests and experience. You have something to offer that your audience could use.

You may be seen as a celebrity and you will be seen as an expert. You might even start thinking this will some day become your full-time job.

** “Never, never, never give up” is a famous quote by a famous stutterer, Winston Churchill*

However...

Please, please, please, please, please don’t forget that it’s not about you.

After all, YOU will learn from your listeners’ experiences as well! Adding humility into the system creates a sustainable self-help community.

Though it’s your podcast (or whatever), an ego always ruins a good time and can create distance between yourself and your audience. Be true to yourself and do what YOU think is best but keep the benefits of your listeners in mind.

The End.

Actually, not quite.

CASE STUDIES

Greg has a podcast called [Stuttering.Me](http://www.stuttering.me) (<http://www.stuttering.me>) dedicated to advocacy and

empowerment. His show got me to proudly stutter my name, which was always a source of embarrassment.

My friend [Kitty](#) is a graphic designer in Guatemala (she's the one who put this ebook together- Hi Kitty!):

"I got help from a Podcast, but it was not on the emotional side, more on the techy one! Back in 2005 I wanted to make the leap from 35mm photography to Digital. I listened (and still do) to [Tips From the Top Floor](http://www.tipsfromthetopfloor.com) (www.tipsfromthetopfloor.com). I used to post on the forums more often when I had less stuff to do, but the community was very helpful when I did the switch. The podcast itself helped me to nail those concert pics that I couldn't do with the 35mm unless I bought a high ISO film."

My friend Sean Jay is a writer in Canada:

"I used Podcasting to build a group of friends and acquaintances while I was going through my divorce.

I was in a new city, didn't know many people, and couldn't talk to the ex (wife at the time) about what I was thinking. Basically, it was a social therapy."

My friend Whitney produces a podcast called, [The LDPodcast](http://www.ldpodcast.com) (www.ldpodcast.com), about learning disabilities:

"I started the LD Podcast mostly because the other parents I knew who had children with mild to moderate learning disabilities were constantly struggling to find good information and resources to help their children. I started out by writing a book, but when I submitted it to a publisher, they were concerned a "mom" book wouldn't sell well. So, I decided I still thought I had valid ideas and a voice, so I started a podcast to test the waters.

Now I get emails from both parents and professionals about learning and learning disabilities issues all the time. The letters I get are touching, and it reaffirms that by helping others, I'm not only using all of my own hard-won experience and things I've learned, (sometimes by trial and error) but that it makes a big difference in the lives of others- well worth getting up in the morning to have that kind of impact- and to have it on a global scale- that's definitely amazing.

I think my favorite listener story was the mom from

South Africa who wondered whether or not her son had ADHD. She sent me a note, we communicated back and forth. Turns out her partner has ADHD, and is chronically underemployed, and she sees parallels between him and their son. By giving her some information and sending her a book (a prize from the show) she seemed to have a much greater sense of how to begin to help manage her son's ADHD so he had a much better experience in school than her husband did."

I had no interest in being an activist for stuttering in the early days of Stuttering is Cool. As I met fellow stutterers, made friends, and learned from them, now everything I do is for the benefit of improving the stuttering experience for my fellow stutterers. Next thing I knew, I created ti-ger.org (check out <http://ti-ger.org> for more information).

ADVOCACY:

True life
fulfillment comes
with life meaning.
Life meaning

comes by adding value back into society. Giving rather than taking.

I started Stuttering is Cool because I had a void that needed filling. I needed to meet other stutterers and help fill their own voids (acceptance, etc.). In doing so, my void was filled. I met other stutterers (online and physically in my geographical area), I learned a heck of a lot and became even more accepting of my stuttering and gave back to the podcasting community by participating in panels and giving presentations on my own.

The End. Officially.



About the author

Daniele Rossi is an intensely creative individual living in Toronto, Canada. He's been drawing, doodling and sketching on any canvas he can find since he was born. His mediums of choice include oil pastel, ink and specifically an 8B pencil. Daniele published his first comic in 2005 and spends his spare time scribbling out a number of creative endeavours including some graphic novels currently in the making.

Meanwhile, Daniele is a web designer by day and has a passion for usability and technology's impact on culture. Along with being an avid social media practitioner and meetup goer, Daniele also produces two podcasts; *Stuttering Is Cool* (stutteringiscool.com), about stuttering empowerment, and *Creative Bender* (danielerossi.ca/creativebender), about creativity.



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