

The New Media Consortium

Sparking Innovative Learning and Creativity

The New Media Consortium (NMC), an international consortium of nearly 200 leading colleges, universities, museums, corporations, and other learning-focused organizations, was founded in 1993 by a group of hardware manufacturers, software developers, and publishers who realized that the ultimate success of their multimedia-capable products depended upon their acceptance by the higher education community in a way that had never been achieved before.

These companies guessed that a community of innovators embedded in leading colleges and universities would amplify the impact of their tools in a wide range of disciplines, and that such a community could be uniquely self-sustaining and adaptive.

To that end, the founding partners launched the first Search for Excellence, to identify schools in which an investment in multimedia capacity could bear fruit. The colleges among the first group of 22 academic institutions — all world-class institutions — were chosen for their demonstrated competence at using new media technologies, as well as their geographic distribution and breadth of academic specialties.

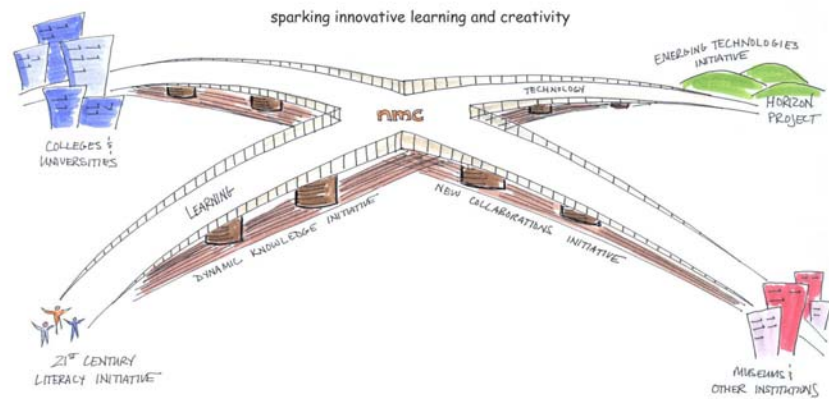
Those 22 institutions initiated an explosion of collaborative activities, and their working group—then called the New Media Centers—quickly evolved into an independent not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation by early 1994, with headquarters in San Francisco.

In 1995, 1998, and again in 2004, the organization expanded the membership and today, the NMC now includes nearly 200 extraordinary colleges, universities, museums, and research centers working together to expand the boundaries of teaching, learning, and creative expression. In 2002, the NMC moved its national headquarters to Austin, Texas, and began to organize its projects and activities into broad but focused initiatives. Working through these initiatives, today's NMC has earned a well-deserved reputation as a leader in the inventive application of technology to challenges in teaching, learning, and creative expression.

Over this time, the mission of the NMC evolved along with technology, and today the consortium serves as a catalyst for the development of all manner of new applications of technology to support learning and creative expression, and sponsors programs and activities designed to stimulate innovation, encourage collaboration, and recognize excellence among its member institutions. Through its many projects, its comprehensive web site, and its series of international conferences, the NMC strives to stimulate dialog and understanding through the exploration of promising ideas, technologies, and applications.

NMC member institutions are found in almost every state in the US, across Canada, and in Europe, Latin America, and Japan. Among the membership are an elite list of the most highly regarded colleges and universities in the world, as well as a growing list of innovative museums, research centers, foundations, and forward-thinking companies.

Four major initiatives organize the NMC's work into clusters. Two of these, the *Emerging Technologies Initiative* and the *21st Century Literacy Initiative*, support the NMC's focus on stimulating innovation, and provide a framework for its explorations. The remaining two initiatives, the *Dynamic Knowledge Initiative* and the *New Collaborations Initiative*, provide the foundation for the work of the consortium.



The *Emerging Technologies Initiative* focuses on expanding the boundaries of teaching, learning and creative expression by creatively applying new tools in new contexts. The Horizon Project, the centerpiece of this initiative, is an ongoing effort of the NMC designed to surface promising new avenues in the applications of technology to teaching, learning, and creative expression in higher education. Using interviews and secondary research to inform discussion and dialog, the project staff work with an Advisory Board to annually identify promising technologies over three time-to-adoption horizons — one year, two to three years, and four to five years.

The NMC's annual *Horizon Report* describes six to eight of these technologies each year, highlighting their potential relevance to teaching, learning and/or creative expression, and identifying promising applications or examples. The *Report*, published in both monograph and electronic forms, is released with a Creative Commons license to facilitate broad distribution. (The 2005 Horizon Report is available at www.nmc.org/horizon.)

The *21st Century Literacy Initiative*, the NMC's newest, is a multi-year effort to explore and expand the potential of new developments in visual and digital literacy. (In 2005, this initiative replaced the longstanding and very successful *Learning Object Initiative*.)

The rationale for this initiative draws its energy from the core values of the NMC and our longtime focus on creative expression. All of us understand, almost on a visceral level, the power and immediacy of imagery. Art, film, photography, drawing — all have the potential to transcend traditional language and evoke an emotional response. These media and images in general are powerful communication tools. The ability to understand this power, to recognize it, to manipulate it and to put it to use involves a set of skills we have begun to call 21st Century Literacy — the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual and digital literacy overlap. The 21st Century Literacy Initiative provides the NMC a mechanism to better explore and understand those skills, and to articulate them.

The *Dynamic Knowledge Initiative (DKI)* provides a mechanism for the NMC to generate, distribute, and share knowledge on topics of interest to the organization. The NMC's *Series of Online Conferences*, through which the NMC is building a web of knowledge and online resources, is the most visible expression of this initiative.

In the DKI's first year, a survey of the literature and existing research was undertaken in the areas of Knowledge Management Systems, Communities of Practice, Knowledge Objects, as well as a range of related topics. This effort formed the underpinnings of the work in

knowledge webs and social computing that has taken place over the succeeding months and years, and is captured on the NMC website at www.nmc.org/projects/dkc.

The NMC's *Series of Online Conferences*, a series of online events based on social computing concepts, launched in the initiative's second year. These online communities are formed around emerging ideas (past topics have included learning objects, social computing, and visual literacy), and allow participants to explore these ideas easily and in depth.

A unique environment, developed by NMC partner iCohere especially to support social computing and its applications for knowledge generation and sharing, lets participants attend the online gatherings from their home or office as their schedules permit, while providing a variety of ways to interact and participate. A recent partnership with LearningTimes has provided an avenue for exploring alternative ways to bring people together in live events.

The NMC is developing prototypical knowledge webs in support of two major projects, the Horizon Project and the Pachyderm Project. Each is using a distinct approach that will allow the NMC to evaluate a number of factors critical to the success of knowledge webs.

The *New Collaborations Initiative* encourages collaboration, knowledge exchange, and joint projects between colleges and universities, museums, libraries, research centers, and other learning-focused organizations. The Pachyderm Project, a partnership led by the NMC and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), is its centerpiece and experimental test bed. Funded in part by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the project partners are creating a new, open source authoring environment for web-based and multimedia learning experiences. The project is an excellent example of cross-sector collaboration, bringing together the metadata and other knowledge of the NMC's library community, the technological skills in infrastructure and programming of NMC university members, and the expertise of a team of experienced interactive producers from a number of leading art museums.

Developed by SFMOMA to make the publication of modular and updateable rich media an easy task, Pachyderm has allowed non-programmers to create a variety of engaging resources that draw from the digital collections of SFMOMA. The result has been detailed interactive learning programs such as *Ansel Adams at 100*, and *Eva Hesse*. To date, literally millions of online and in-museum users have used the interactive learning programs authored using Pachyderm at SFMOMA.

The *Pachyderm 2.0 Project* has created an interoperable, robust, easily distributable version of Pachyderm that is open-source and includes a wide range of pedagogical templates. Pachyderm 2.0 is being pilot tested by leading museums and universities across North America in an extensive series of field tests. The learning materials created with Pachyderm 2.0 are optimized for Internet delivery, easily reusable, and conformant with key search, archival, and cataloging standards. The final product, to be released in fall 2005, will be made available to the field at no charge as an explicit goal of the project.

The latest information on the Pachyderm 2.0 Project, including an extensive collection of papers, reports, and detailed specifications for the tool, can be found in the Pachyderm website at www.nmc.org/pachyderm.

The NMC brings all this work together each year in its flagship event, the annual *NMC Summer Conference*, which attracts nearly 500 participants each June. Regional and online conferences throughout the year bring members together for topically focused dialogs.

These forums are designed to explore not only emerging ideas and technologies, but also the tough pedagogical, legal, and technological issues that often accompany them. An ongoing series of smaller projects and events target issues and technologies still on the horizon for in-depth exploration.

As a central part of its mission, the NMC encourages and supports innovation in the pursuit of effective collaboration, especially in the activities and projects in which it plays a leadership role.

For more information on the NMC, visit its web site at www.nmc.org.

Dr. Larry Johnson is Chief Executive Officer of the New Media Consortium (NMC), an international consortium of colleges, universities, museums and technology companies dedicated to using new technologies to inspire, energize, stimulate, and support learning and creative expression. He is an acknowledged expert on the effective application of information technology in higher education, and has authored a number of books, monographs, and articles on that topic, as well as on the related areas of distance learning, strategic planning, and institutional effectiveness.

Dr. Johnson has nearly 25 years of experience in the higher education arena, having served in roles from faculty to dean to senior executive and CEO. His last college position was as president and CEO of Fox Valley Technical College, in Appleton, Wisconsin. An author and principal investigator for several important national and international studies, he has been recognized for his research by the Sloan Foundation, the American Association of Community Colleges, and the American Association of University Administrators. Johnson can be reached via email at johnson@nmc.org.