

The rush of reckoning

Jordan writes:

It's nice to learn I'm part of an arts community. I was at the season opener for the Broadway Center in Tacoma. You gave an introductory speech about the economic impact of the arts in Puget Sound. I hadn't realized how every time I go to a show, or listen to yours, I'm helping to grow my local economy. Is this a trend?

You are part of something big, Jordan. The arts in Puget Sound generate, with the exception of Manhattan, more economic growth than any American metropolitan area! The conservative estimate for Seattle alone was 330 million dollars this year. Add that to Seattle's standing as the most literate city in America, and you have a self-sustaining culture kitchen. It's the self-sustaining part that I want to stress here, because some very smart people have been working behind the scenes to help you support your community almost without a second thought. With every purchase decision you make, from groceries to a night at the opera, you can return a dividend to this area's economy. It's called checkout activism, and it's head-smackingly simple. Arts supporters, we have a new tool!

Imagine an arts-friendly economy fueled not by the wealthy few, but by every purchase you and I make. A "values-based economy" where contribution is a default, not an act of courage. Four magic words get it working: "Same cost, your cause." All that needs to happen is for local businesses to unite and agree that on every 100 dollars they make, 1 goes

back to your favorite local cause, 1 goes to you for your patronage, and 1 goes to the people who disburse and manage the payments. It's self-sustaining. The model has already generated millions in Boston, and Seattle is the next target demographic. Check out the Interra Project (<http://www.interraproject.org/>) to get a sense for how it works.

Seattle is already a crucible of progress. If all progress comes from connecting people, then checkout activism works by connecting communities that are already here, but simply need to meet each other. Take the social networks on one hand, and the financial networks on the other. Why should they not get a chance to aim in the same direction? The romantic poet Rilke once said that the ideal relationship consists of two formerly bordering solitudes gazing at the same horizon. A values-based economy identifies the bordering solitudes, and brings them to the same telescope pointing at the horizon. On that horizon is a giant billboard — surely made of 100% recycled paperboard — that reads "Congratulations. You're late. Now let's get to work."

Checkout activism. It's gaining steam, but it's not a new idea. 60 years ago, the Bullit family set up a classical radio station in Seattle called Classical King FM (a little shameless horn-tooting here) whose proceeds would go to a non-profit organization called Beethoven. The sole purpose of Beethoven is to fund the arts in Puget Sound. When you listen, you're paying for more arts around us. But you didn't know it, did you? That's the way checkout activism will work in its new form as more businesses catch on. Only this time you'll get to pick where your money goes, with one click on a

web site. Same cost, your cause.

Chief Seattle uttered some scary words two centuries ago:
“We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.”

It’s a small consolation to know that the world wide “web” of our own century can help us weave new strands to replace the ones we’ve damaged. Late as we are to protecting the web of life, we at least admit we’re no longer the biggest thing around. But this movement may be. For further inspiration, check out a project that assigns this “largest movement in human history” a name: *The Shift*.
(<http://www.theshiftmovie.com>)

Sean MacLean can be heard weekdays from 3 to 7 p.m. on king.org and 98.1 KING-FM. Send your questions to King.org/Sean