The More We Know: NBC News, Educational Innovation, and Learning from Failure

Eric Klopfer and Jason Haas
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012.
Foreword, preface, references, index,
images, charts, tables. 205 pp. $27.95
paper. ISBN: 9780262017947

The More We Know tells the story of a partnership between NBC News and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in their attempt to revolutionize the way young people view network news and learn U.S. history in schools. NBC News desperately needed a way to connect to a younger demographic, and scholars at MIT were looking for opportunities to bring their innovations in using games and social media in education to a wider audience. By all appearances, it seemed to be an excellent match, and they partnered to create iCue, described on the book flap as "an interactive learning venture that combined social networking, online video, and gaming in one multimedia educational site." Despite what seemed like auspicious circumstances, iCue failed to establish a regular audience, and NBC pulled the plug on the site after less than three years. So what went wrong?

This is the central question pursued in *The More We Know*. Authors Klopfer and Haas, both MIT members of the iCue development team, chart the project's rise and fall and describe the lessons learned in an accessible and engaging fashion. The opening chapters provide background to the project and introduce some of the key players like MIT's education visionary Alex Chisholm and the newly installed CFO of NBC Universal Adam Jones, a man who understood the dire need for his corporation to join the digital revolution already well underway. The two parties' interests converged on the vast repository of the NBC News archive, an unused but rich cache of nearly a century of news stories that existed only on decaying media such as film and magnetic tape. Jones needed a compelling reason to digitize the archive, and Chisholm gave it to him with his concept of letting students access multimedia "cue cards" of news stories that they could order and organize as a means of drawing connections between historical events.

While the outcome is never in question (the authors state from the start that this is a study of a failed project), much of what makes *The More We Know* such a compelling read is that iCue, with its promise to combine media, games, and participatory culture for educational purposes, seems like a sure bet. Klopfer and Haas use interviews and other primary sources to portray the actors in this drama as well-rounded characters. These aren't egg-headed academics who refuse to understand market demands or cutthroat business people only interested in the bottom line; all the major decision makers explain, often in their own words, their goals for the project and the various external pressures they had to contend with as they did their best to move things forward. There is no villain of the piece and no single, critical oversight that led to the project's downfall. Instead, it was largely an accumulation of unforeseen resistances, an overly aggressive schedule, and a ballooning budget that undid iCue.

One criticism of iCue might be leveled equally at *The More We Know*: that of audience. iCue suffered from the targeting

of too small a market by focusing on high school Advance Placement (AP) history as the subject matter. As a result, the project struggled to identify a sustainable target market. Was it AP history teachers, or their school districts? Was it textbook publishers? Or was it the students themselves? *The More We Know* discusses high-profile meetings between power players at major institutions who had immense resources at their disposal, a situation most educators dealing with shoestring budgets will never experience. As with iCue itself, this might be less a criticism and more a regret that with a slight shift in focus, the book could be more relevant to a much broader audience.

This does not prevent *The More We Know* from being an interesting and important book, and it is well worth reading for anyone interested in the intersection of media, technology, and the future of education. The final chapter, which distills the lessons learned, will be particularly valuable for those contemplating their own ventures into innovative educational approaches. This is especially important at a time when topics such as gamification and online learning interest both academics and a software industry seeking to prompt—and profit from—an educational revolution. *The More We Know* encourages such partnerships but underscores the importance of being aware of the web of competing interests involved and of proceeding with caution.

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The Future Was Here: The Commodore Amiga

Jimmy Maher
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012. Contents, notes, index, glossary, bibliography. 344 pp. $26.95 paper. ISBN: 9780262017206

Codename Revolution: The Nintendo Wii Platform

Steven E. Jones and George K. Thiruvathukal
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012. Contents, notes, bibliography, index. 216 pp. $24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780262016803

As the second and third titles in the Platform Studies series from MIT Press, *The Future Was Here* (2012) by Jimmy Maher and *Codename Revolution* (2012) by Steven E. Jones and George K. Thiruvathukal continue the series beyond the launch title coauthored by its editors, Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort. In their *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System* (2009), Bogost and Montfort advanced a critical approach to historicizing the Atari VCS by reading the relationships among its technical affordances and influence on and by human culture. These latest titles share this fundamental interest in the links involving the artifacts produced on a platform, the technology involved, and the culture that surrounds both. But the chronological and thematic breadth of the works under review also demonstrate that the Platform Studies approach can provide insight both to older systems as well as emerging situations of play. *The Future Was Here* will be of greatest value to those wishing to learn a good deal about an important transitional system, the Commodore Amiga (produced