

# The perils of **INVITING STAKEHOLDERS** into your community: Our learnings from the 5th week

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User-driven innovation is hard and it is not always fun hearing the honest truth from your customers as you engage with them and invite them to become co-creators.

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One thing that is really challenging when open sourcing your product is to actually embrace the input coming from your community members: User-driven innovation is hard, and it is not always fun hearing the honest truth from your customers as you engage with them and invite them to become co-creators. This 5th phase in the REMODEL program pushed the companies to start imagining what it means to meet their community.

As the work of the participating companies has started to reach a mature conceptual stage, we have now entered the last half of the program which focuses on reaching out, soliciting feedback from different stakeholders, scoping a potential community and continually iterating and finetuning the new, open source-based strategy for their product. A mix of classic design steps and a venture into the still largely uncharted territory of open source hardware business model making and community building. In other words: The hard part is no longer grappling with understanding the concepts of open source and how to apply it in their own specific manufacturing industry, but rather to start to look beyond their own resources and into the global reservoir of expertise that is the Internet.



### Phase 5 - Community testing round one

In the 5th phase of REMODEL, the IO companies are starting to engaging with what can potentially become their community of co-creators. Concretely through organizing a hackathon (in a board-game style simulation exercise) to collect feedback from imagined stakeholders like makers, hackers, designers, pro-users and even investors. Next, they revise their “System Maps” and “Open-o-Meters” (as introduced in earlier phases of the program) based on that feedback. Lastly, they send all their materials to their mentors from the REMODEL Expert Panel for review and commenting.

### Hack-a-thon: The boardgame

One way to get (early) feedback on an idea or a product - as well as to take the first steps of building a community of co-creators - is to organize a “hackathon”. A hackathon is an event in which external people (and often the general public) is invited to join a session of exploration and co-creation around a challenge set by the organizer of the event: In this case, it would be to give feedback on the open product idea and to help make it better. A hackathon is originally a highly design-driven way of collaborative

problem-solving and creative tinkering coming out of the maker-world, but a concept which has increasingly been picked up in the corporate world to create rapid prototypes. In any case, it is a great, quick and informal way of inviting stakeholders (and other curious people) into a high-yield discussion and co-creation exercise.

To ensure the REMODEL program remains lightweight and easy to go through, however, we opted to not have the companies run an actual hackathon, but instead simulate one. This happened through the REMODEL hackathon boardgame:



The REMODEL hackathon boardgame

In the boardgame the company organizes a hackathon: They start out by drawing persona-cards that represent people who you could expect would show up at a hackathon, such as makers, pro-users and designers. The

company is also instructed in pitching their open product idea (in front of a camera) to make sure all the imagined attendees actually understands what the company wants them to do. The company then draws question cards that present them with challenging questions and critique as if spoken by the personas. All this fuels a discussion on the company's work team and gives valuable input that really challenges the existing product concept.

### **Feedback from experts in the field**

After simulating the hackathon and revising their concept and materials according to the reflections coming out of the hackathon, the company sent their work materials for review by their two assigned mentors from the REMODEL Expert Panel: As an invaluable resource in exploring cutting-edge open source strategies and business models, REMODEL draws upon the expertise of some of the world's finest experts in the field including business developers, consultants, academics, CEOs, thought leaders and activists. As part of the REMODEL design sprint, the companies get to solicit feedback from these experts and discuss in depth their specific approach towards open source business development.



The REMODEL mentors

**Key learnings: It is hard to engage with a community, but even harder to motivate it**

For several of the companies, the hackathon-exercise was quite a revelation of the kind of blunt input (and expectations) that a vested community can present the community organizer with. The board game had questions such as: “Who is going to offer support to modify the product?” and “I would like to copy and sell your open product, is that okay then?”. The reflections from the companies were many and included:

- A community will challenge your assumptions: It is really, really hard to predict what the community will want to do with your open product. You cannot assume your way forward but have to relinquish control to a certain extent. This is an advantage because the more agency you give your community, the more innovation space it will have.

- Motivating your community is hard: The “build it and they will come”-approach often doesn’t work; you need to actively work to get them involved, especially in the beginning. Why should they spend their time as co-creators? What is in it for them that they could not get before (when the product was proprietary/closed) or with your competitor?
- A whole new level of user involvement: One of the companies really hit the head on the nail by saying that what open sourcing really is is customer involvement on steroids: To base your product on a real demand (which is design's ABC), you need the input of the people with a need that your product addresses. No need, no sale. Customer-insight (and hence input) is the key to success. No input is better than what you get from a customer who feels a sense of co-ownership of the product. A customer who is vested in the continued development and improvement of the product. This is what you get from those who join the community as co-creators.

Stay tuned for the recap of the 6th week of the REMODEL sprint and many more learnings!

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**This article is part of a series about the REMODEL programme**

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