

2014-09-08 Talk by Mark Latham at [CodeCore](#) on [Info Co-op](#)

Registration & info at events.codecore.ca -- free but spaces limited.

Audience: Rails students in 9-week bootcamp course, nearing end of course. Also other local Rails developers.

My bio:

Mark Latham is a financial economist and founder of Votermedia.org (cv: [linkedin.com/in/marklatham](https://www.linkedin.com/in/marklatham); Twitter: [@votermedia](https://twitter.com/votermedia)). After a career in academia and Wall Street, he took early semi-retirement to work on reforming corporations. This project expanded to include reform of democracies and co-ops. Mark's focus is the economics of voter information. He is now proposing to create an information co-op, to demonstrate the effectiveness of his information market design – see votermedia.org/publications.

[Audience may have read the 4-page [info co-op outline](#).]

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Talk Notes:

[Use browser & projector to display links below.]

Thanks for the invitation to talk with you.

This talk is about a **new business** idea that I'm planning to build a Rails website for. It's a nonprofit business -- a **co-op**. Any of you a member of a co-op? Like Mountain Equipment Co-op or Vancity Credit Union. The business of this co-op is **information** -- any kind of info that people would pay for. "Info" can include **software**, so this is also about the software business.

So I'm not going to teach you anything new about **Rails**. By now you know more about Rails than I do. I have built a Rails website before -- at votermedia.org -- **open source** BTW. The new co-op website will also be based on that, also open source, but will need some more **features** that I'm not sure how to build. So at the end of the talk, I'm going to ask you **how to build them**.

But first let me explain **why** I want to create an info co-op. My goal is to demonstrate an info market design that I created to help **voters** get better informed -- voters in democracies and in corporations. Better voter info can help us **reduce corruption** in democracies and corporations. So it's an agenda to make a **better world**. See voter communities list at votermedia.org.

My background is in finance, **Wall Street**, and seeing the corruption there made me want to work on reforming it. Then seeing similar corruption in **democracies**, I'm working on reforming them too. We did a successful test of my voter info market design in the **UBC student union** -- see videos at votermedia.org.

But **elected leaders** don't want to allocate funding to info systems that might criticize them and reduce their power. We need to **show voters** that this will help them, so they will demand it. So I'm turning to other types of info, that people would pay for.

E.g. **Vancouver area** residents might pay **\$1/month** for info that would help them **save money** on cell phone plans, banking, gasoline or whatever. **1000 people** x \$1/month would pay for researchers to provide such info. I will inject some \$ to get this started.

More detail: votermedia.org/publications.

The market design is very **laissez-faire**: Channels provide any info they want, and members vote to pay pooled funds to the channels they find useful. Example ballot: votermedia.org/vancouver. This is designed for news blogs => adapt to other types of info. Competition => max info per \$ => **close to free** but enough \$ to pay creators. Software too BTW.

So here are the website design **questions** I'm trying to answer:

- 1. Login** on co-op website gives access to 10 or 20 channel websites.
 - Facebook-like shared login?
 - API?
 - authentication token in URL when user links from ballot to channel?

2. Storefront: Each channel website can upload & change its display on the co-op ballot. Instead of blog post links, it could link to content pages as decided by that channel.

Who wants to help build this? mark@votermedia.org

Past team members at votermedia.org/about_contact -- most have moved on, like Bradley -- need new people.

Can also compete for \$ as a channel provider; or just join the new co-op. News will be on twitter @votermedia and at votermedia.blogspot.ca.

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Side point: Corporate reform by proxy voting empowerment --

proxydemocracy.org

Climate Change: proxydemocracy.org/fund_owners/focus_lists/25

I served on the SEC Investor Advisory Committee: (votermedia.wordpress.com/2009/10/02/seciac-members-subcommittees-constituencies)

Bradley now works at SEC.