

HOW TO START YOUR OWN GRAFFITI RESEARCH LAB

STARTING YOUR OWN FAKE LABORATORY IS EASY, BUT WE'LL TRY TO MAKE IT SEEM HARD IN THESE SIX POMPOUS STEPS.



STEP 1:

HACKERS AND GRAFFITI WRITERS UNITE!

The street and the net are both filled with opportunities for small people to alter the course of large systems. Hackers pieced up the internet by sharing ideas, and writers hacked a billion-dollar transportation system to move their art around town for free.

STEP 2:

STOP ASKING PERMISSION FROM LAW - ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS, CITY OFFICIALS, ARTS ORGANIZATIONS, AND COPYRIGHT OWNERS (BUT FEEL FREE TO TAKE THEIR \$\$\$). CAUSING MAYHEM IN PUBLIC IS LIKE DOWNLOADING MUSIC ON THE INTERNET; IF ENOUGH OF US RUSH THE GUARDS, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO TAKE US ALL OUT.

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STEP 2:

WORK IN PUBLIC SPACES AND THE PUBLIC DOMAIN. YOU SHOULD BE OPEN WITH YOUR PROCESS TO THE POINT OF BEING SKEEZY. HIT WALLS AND NETWORKS AND MINDS FOR FREE. YOUR ONLY REWARD WILL BE A PURPOSE AND AN ARMY OF COLLABORATORS WHO ARE LEGION AND LOYAL. NO PATENTS, NO COPYRIGHT, NO PROPERTY... FAME.

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BEST AND BRIGHTEST 2007:

James Powderly, 31, and Evan Roth, 29, street artists and founders of Graffiti Research Lab.



Graffiti Research Lab

They build tools of subversion and mass dissent. Like a giant graffiti laser. And throwable lights. It's street art gone high tech. And the start of a whole new movement.

★★★★

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STEP 4:

BUILD AN AUDIENCE AND DON'T BE PICKY. The Bored at Work Network is ready to be chronically distracted by your MySpace page, so make it BLING. Your mission here is to lower office productivity, make open-source the 6th element of hip-hop and convince suburban kids to stop buying junk and start making better smoke bombs.



STEP 5: MAKE SHIT

Like a tricycle with an audio system loud enough to set off car alarms, test your prototype in the streets. Keep the camera rolling, especially if the cops show up. Make a web page to post your documentation and research. Release early, often, and with rap music.



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GRAFFITI RESEARCH LAB'S goal is to get the tools of provocation and media subversion into as many hands as possible. To do this, founders James Powderly and Evan Roth have combined their backgrounds in robotics (Powderly once worked for a NASA contractor) and street art (Roth was a valdicatorian at Parsons the New School for Design in New York) to create the equivalent of virtual spray-paint cans.

They have a laser projector that they use to "tag" skyscrapers and other structures, like the Brooklyn Bridge (above). Point the laser pen at the wall and you can write in spray-paint letters thirty feet high. There are LED throwies—little lights that when tossed at ferromagnetic walls or signs, stick like luminescent sprinkles—and riot strikes, three-wheeled rigs with amplifiers that cause commotion and impromptu parades wherever they're ridden.

Once GRL builds a tool, they take it to the street to demonstrate. Then they put videos, pictures, and step-by-step directions for how to build it online—everything is open source, meant to be shared by all, improved by all. GRL's only rule is that they not be used for commercial means—not always an easy stance, since advertising and media companies seeking street cred are often first in line to co-opt their methods.

Since its founding in 2005 at the Eyebeam OpenLab in New York, GRL has morphed and grown. Today it is based out of Powderly and Roth's own Brooklyn-based F.A.T. Lab (which stands for Free Art & Technology), and other cells, which use and improve upon their tactics, have bubbled up all over the globe. Some build their own throwies and laser projectors; others just appropriate the GRL name and principles. But all have the same mission: to mar the smooth surface of things, voice a little dissent. And get as many people as possible to follow suit.

—TYLER CABOT



culture



> GRL has active splinter cells in eleven cities over four continents, which use either its name or tools or both. Above, in numerical order: Palo Alto, Tijuana, Mexico City, Minneapolis, Toronto, New York City, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Vienna, Taiwan, Melbourne.