Seminars
Hannah Rudman (chair), David Stark and Toby Coffey
Innovative approaches to working with digital media

Hannah Rudman is Project Lead of AmbITion (http://getambition.com), a national digital development programme. She advises on national cultural policy around digital development for England, Scotland and Wales and is Specialist Advisor to the Scottish Arts Council, the Mission Models Money programme, to IC:Innovative Craft and is a Project Mentor to the £1m Edinburgh Portal Project Pilot. She is also Arts Professional's 'Harnessing IT' columnist and on the boards of Milk With 2 Sugars and New Media Scotland (http://consultrudman.com). Hannah recently founded Envirodigital (http://envirodigital.com) – a change agency that encourages organisations to become environmentally sustainable through digital developments. Envirodigital is helping to establish the new National Theatre Wales.

David Stark is Director of Marketing and Communications for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, one of five Scottish National Companies supported by the Scottish Government. He joined the marketing team in 2002 before spending a year with Scottish Opera and then returning to the RSNO in 2006 to see the Orchestra's renaissance, as audiences grew by a third, subscriptions by 120% and the launch of a number of successful new audience series such as *Classic Bites*, *Symphonies at Six*, *Naked Classics*, *Out & About* and *orchestra+*. David's passion for orchestras comes from twenty years of trumpet practice, culminating in a music degree at the University of York. Prior to this, David embarked on an abortive course in Electronic Engineering which left him with an interest in gadgets and things that blink.

Toby Coffey is Senior Digital Designer at the Royal National Theatre. He works across many key projects, is a member of their digital steering group and chairs the digital producers forum. Projects at the National have included the design of the National's Digital Archive, the design and production of *The Big Wall* – a large touch screen interface and the development of online and digital branding, including the design of the National's new website which launched in June 2009. As part of the National's new Digital Media Unit, Toby has also recently co-produced the feature length documentary *Making War Horse* for DVD and broadcast release.

This seminar explored innovative approaches to enhancing our programmes, distributing content and increasing engagement with the public via digital media. It explored the potential for collaboration across the sector to leverage the budgets and resources required to maximise the potential of digital media for the arts.

Collaboration and building communities via digital strategies

Hannah Rudman introduced the session by introducing the speakers and outlining some key themes, especially looking at the operational organisational framework within which we are working.

What is an innovative approach to digital media? It's probably about changes in the way we are working, such as collaboration and building communities.

Why is this happening? Digital development is the result of technological change, which is having economic and social impacts and in turn is leading to significant cultural behaviour changes.

These developments have hit the cultural sector hard – not just on account of the technology but also because we have spent the last hundred years trying to control the way we work with people. It's now necessary to work with people in a different way.

A question frequently asked of me is: does this technology make everyone an artist? The answer is 'not really'. Just because people have snazzy digital cameras, doesn't mean they don't still look to artists for inspiration. It's about people choosing to be an artist by vocation. However, the masses want to create and innovative. Some businesses are leading and they do this because they understand that *'our focus should be not on emerging technologies but on emerging cultural practices'* (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture, When Old and New Media Collide*).

If we go back to medieval times, culture such as mummers' plays used to be participated in. Then over the last 100 years we have professionalised our art; it is made in special places by special people. Now we are in an era in which people have the tools and the connectivity to make culture together again. This affects cultural behaviour.

HR then played Charles Leadbeater's video promo of his book *We Think* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiP79vYsfbo) which makes points such as *'we want to be players … we want to take to the stage.'* This can strike terror in those who have been traditionally responsible for bringing work to the stage. But it's not about amateurs on stage as such; it's about them wanting to be involved.

Dell has done this. It has opened up the debate through *'Ideastorm'*, asking people to say what they would like Dell to do next. It's saying – this product is yours, tell us how you'd like us to make it. Users not only post up their ideas but they are then voted on, so Dell can incorporate the most popular ones, knowing they already have support.

The people with the best ideas don't necessarily work for the organisation. Sony are making computer games such as *'Little Big Planet'* in which users create the levels, the play spaces and then you swap them with friends. You play their games and they play yours.

Ebbsfleet Community Football Club is owned and run by the community, entirely online.

There are now 250 million people on Facebook and 75 million people on Twitter (November 2009).

- 76% of social network members upload photos, up from 45% the previous year
- The number of people reading blogs has started to level off, with 71% of active internet users reading blogs, up from only 70% the previous year
- 17% of active internet users access online content through mobile devices as well as home, work, or school computers

Every business is digital. Information is everywhere and readily accessible. Our customers are online and we can't control the message.

> *'Company boards don't recognise what IT is or what it does anymore. It used to be a thing that you used to increase productivity or automate processes, but that's been done. Even CIOs who thoroughly understand enterprise IT have been left behind by social IT – which they can't control. Today's technology is about communities.'*
> Steve Prentice, Gartner (IT Consultancy)

These might be niche communities of people using one application. The Royal Opera House put together a libretto using Twitter; interesting project, weird libretto. Or iFringe, an application for the iPhone from Edinburgh Festivals, which required a great deal of collaboration because of the need to compile a range of listings and reviews.

We're beginning to see people measuring the social media output. There are aggregators which can measure words like 'good' or 'bad' in relation to your organisation.

Of course, this goes beyond marketing to a range of interesting initiatives.

Other people are raising money through social media; for example through 'Super Chirp'. Most of the money for *The Age of Stupid* film was raised online.

National Theatre Wales has developed an online community before it has even announced what its artistic programme will be [see John McGrath above under keynotes].

Hoipolloi Theatre [see Simon Bedford session below under seminars], is using all sorts of innovative online media to communicate with their audiences.

David Stark: National Performing Arts Companies of Scotland

David began by wishing everyone a Happy St Andrews Day.

After 18 months of collaborative work, this project is only at the beginning of developing a new digital platform. So there aren't any lovely websites to show, gadgets to demonstrate or screenshots to dazzle you.

This though, is the story of the collaborative process so far: the highs and lows of what is necessary to get five large, well-established and highly strategic organisations to work together, learn together and take big decisions together.

The five National Performing Arts Companies of Scotland (NPACS) receive core funding directly from the Scottish Government. They are:

- National Theatre of Scotland: an innovative touring company which works with actors, directors and theatre companies – who tour across Scotland and internationally.

- Royal Scottish National Orchestra: 90-strong symphony orchestra performing in Scotland's six cities and touring to smaller towns and villages, and internationally.

- Scottish Ballet: 36 dancers, 41 staff and 70 p/t freelance orchestra. Performing across Scotland, UK and abroad.

- Scottish Chamber Orchestra: 37-piece chamber orchestra, performing across Scotland and internationally, including annual tours of Scottish Highlands and Islands.

- Scottish Opera: Scotland's national opera company and largest performing arts organisation in Scotland performing main scale opera in four cities and performances in 50 other theatres, village halls and community centres.

It's a diverse group but there is much in common, perhaps most importantly all have to deliver across Scotland whether in a small community in the Highlands or the middle of Glasgow. All five companies have major education and community engagement programmes.

Catalysts for collaboration

If you are going to collaborate there must be reasons to do it.

The Scottish Government is keen to see cost savings by sharing resources or services whenever possible. So far, this had led to small wins on the infrastructure side and, though the companies talk with each other regularly, we had not yet embarked on a complete project together.

The five companies also shared a desire to work together – in order to improve delivery and reach, giving more people the chance to experience great art.

Additionally – and timely for us – Missions Models Money (MMM) were about to embark on six pilot projects about collaborative working and shared services… and were looking for willing guinea pigs. As well as providing resources, it also enabled access to a pool of specialists in online work and social media.

Next, it was important to establish a common purpose. The five companies had been unsuccessful on collaborating on an artistic project – it was too complicated. Similarly, the education programmes of each company were very different and education teams were at full capacity.

Marketing collaborations were proving useful and helpful, but only to a certain degree, beyond which we hadn't yet feared to tread.

But: none of the five had yet realised the full potential of technology platforms…

We decided to investigate, together, the development of shared technology platforms. This was where there was potential to increase public engagement opportunities – and be 'greater than the sum of our parts'.

None of us were fully realising the potential of technology on our own anyway (with the exception of the National Theatre of Scotland which was already had a number of initiatives running) – and probably didn't have the resources to go it alone.

At this stage we didn't know what kind of shared technology platform we wanted and some of us didn't know what a shared technology platform was.

In addition, to get five, large, proud institutions to collaborate on a major project it's important to get the men and women at the top to believe in it. Therefore, chief executives were brought together for briefing and training in the delights of Twitter, Second Life, blogging and all the rest. It was a good start and many have kept up their interest on an ongoing basis.

Ning was also especially important as a crucial tool for sharing and discussing ideas.

Decision time

We all agreed that we were not yet ready to face the challenges of contract negotiations/union negotiations, infrastructure costs, artistic decisions and licensing that would be involved in a fully-realised content-delivery vision. So instead, we decided to begin our work with a social media presence, a place where the five individual brands could co-exist and where we could begin to network with shared audiences and new audiences, attracted by the strength of five companies together.

The strengths of our joint presence were:

- Cross promotion
- Networking opportunities across five existing audiences and their friends
- More companies = more content, more discussion, more activity
- Easier to reach the 'high-hanging fruit'

There were some weighty issues to consider:

- Are we creating a new brand or just a new 'space'?
- How should joint NPACS activities relate/integrate with/replace current company social/web activities?
- What internal resources can we each bring to the table?
- How will we maintain momentum – who drives this?

We actually chose an external driver for the project – a small external consultancy – because they could drive the content as well and encourage us to participate.

In terms of the platform itself, it was decided that enriching the experience of the current enthusiasts should be the initial thrust. By engaging them and giving them the tools and incentives to spread the word, we can encourage them to bring their personal networks of friends, family and contacts to the site… turning supporters into evangelists for the companies.

The platform will have its own distinctive branding, reflected across all external activities (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). However, individual companies retain their own branding within their respective spaces on the site.

Collaborative hurdles

These are some of things we've had to work through:

- Competition for ticket sales
- Maintaining individual identities in conversations with audiences
- Agreeing on a clearly defined target audience
- Impact on other collaborations outside NPACS
- Differing definitions of what is 'sensitive' material or appropriate conversation tones

The key features of the site will include:

- Clear NPACS branding/identity (it won't be called NPACS!)
- Unified calendar of events
- Each company has its own info pages and blog
- Central to homepage is news section and discussion forums
- Members area with features and promos

Finally, a few questions to consider:

- If you are collaborating, how willing are you to get the difficult questions on the table?
- Are you collaborating for collaboration's sake or is there a real reason to do it?
- Is everyone in agreement with the aims and final result?
- Who are you going to bring in – an external facilitator that will ensure a good balance between the partners and drive the project?
- Are we all working on putting in the content?

Toby Coffey: Innovative approaches to digital media, National Theatre

There are two areas of innovation to talk about; the first is *the innovation of the new* which is the exploitation of new technological opportunities and the second is *the innovation of the now* which is using and reviewing what already exists, often through digital means.


This presentation will look at these two areas through the 'Nation' campaign and other current NT digital initiatives.

The first performance of the National Theatre (NT) company took place in 1963 and it has been in the current building since 1976. There are over 26 new productions per year with 1100 performances across 3 theatres, reaching over 1.3 million people in the course of the year. It is well resourced, with a core staff of 700. The NT is fortunate in this respect.

Nation is the fourth in the series of winter family productions. It's a high priority of the NT and therefore there is an all-guns-blazing element to the support of the production.

There is a simple but fundamental consideration to make when developing digital campaigns, which is to create artwork which works in landscape as well as portrait formats due to the nature of the screen.
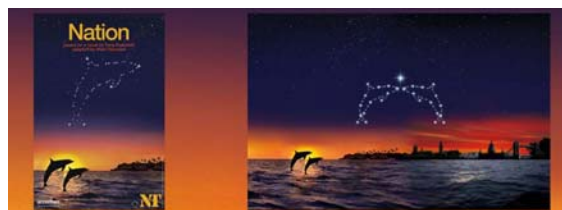
The core arsenal for this marketing campaign includes a standard mix of posters, flyers and advertisements, email and direct mail campaigns – and to this are added the digital components such as a 'home page takeover' because of its importance for the NT, with Nation having the primary presence on the NT home page. There are also around 14 different digital video assets, production gallery, rehearsal gallery, vox pops and the trailer.

Within the development of the trailer, the creative team has significant input (into the storyboards for example). It has to be produced ahead of the production and having the artistic team involved makes for an excellent result.

There are also vox pops and video diaries which require experience, expertise and resources to achieve them well.

The Big Wall is a 6x1.5m interactive touch screen wall located in the foyer of the NT. It's a stand-alone interactive installation which allows content to be presented in different ways, providing ways into the production and greater depth in its background.

It's an experimental initiative and was developed in association with Accenture who were pleased to have feedback on their technology, especially welcoming the NT's creative – artistic response. There are two spin-off projects with an e-card functionality and material being fed back into the website. This project, though experimental, has therefore had other useful consequences for the NT's work.

Extending the reach

Social media platforms have enabled different types of dialogue to take place. Particularly successful has been the YouTube video of *War Horse* which has had over 96,000 views and 180 comments. It allows a different style of dialogue.

Another successful collaboration was with *The Guardian*; a 'Guardian Nation' competition. Co-writer Mark Ravenhill took a few lines from the script and then the audience was asked to take time adapting the script and then to come back and post something on YouTube. One entrant [played by TC] spent three weeks working on their response. These people become your digital ambassadors. Two of the best videos will be used as previews for NT Live Nation around the world. Next time, NT will introduce a public vote as part of the process.

NT Live is about making the art-form accessible whilst maintaining its integrity. A production is filmed and broadcast at cinemas around the world. The number of venues that have been involved in NT Live has now exceeded 230. Interesting unexpected outcomes included hundreds of emails saying how impressed they were, including some from abroad who said

they would never otherwise get to the NT. Elderly people were appreciative of having the enhanced video and audio which made it much easier to follow and communities which had moved away from London also enjoyed being re-connected.

It has been important to be innovative about how NT uses its what's on information. Through careful planning we are able to use different platforms for a variety of content without too much extra work.

In summary, in order to develop you must: learn, try, test, experiment.

Questions and discussion

The session was then opened up to questions and discussion from the floor.

How expensive was The Big Wall?

TC. We shared the costs with Accenture because it was a joint project. The equipment can be quite costly, but you can do cheaper versions using inexpensive touch screens. A big issue for us as well was the large amount of space it took up. It was interesting and useful for us because it was a 'stand-up experience' – lasting 5 minutes or so.

Do you [DS] feel that five is a good number for collaboration?

DS. An interesting question. The five were defined by the funding process. If it all works though it would be possible to introduce other companies. What about all the other great things that are happening in Scotland? Down the line this will need to be considered. In terms of the collaborative process itself, it makes for a good number of people round a table taking into consideration that sometimes it's necessary to have different departments in attendance – which can be many people.

Have you [DS] set any audience development objectives?

DS. We have some targets but they aren't very specific. There were discussions for example about the types of people we were trying to attract but it was difficult to agree and was left fairly open. We will be doing some data-tracking of the people visiting us online and we are looking to find some of the high-hanging fruit that I talked about earlier.