

Will McInnes, Nixon McInnes

Introduction

Will McInnes is an expert on how the internet is changing our personal behaviour, our organisations and society. The specialist consultancy he founded, NixonMcInnes, is one of only two UK organizations to have made the WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces. He is also a non-executive director of Wired Sussex, which supports the development of the digital business community in Brighton and is a TEDx speaker.

McInnes regularly provides comment and opinion to the media, including a live appearance on BBC News 24 television, on BBC radio and in the Financial Times. He is married with two energetic young boys, is a mountain biking geek, loves camping and eating far too much curry.

Will has particular expertise in the social web, and is part of the movement to harness and understand the cultural impact of online social networks like Twitter and Facebook. In this presentation he looked at the influence and opportunities presented by the next generation of technological advances.

The world is in flux

There were some great Tweets earlier [in the session about the breakdown of the video link], my favourite being 'why is the future always broken when it comes to technology?' I couldn't agree more. Technology usually is broken but how do we participate in the breaking of it and the making sense of it?

On the flight up to Glasgow I met someone I was at marketing college with who spoke about a company who was bringing a performance to her venue who told her 'yes what we do is bring it to London and then take it out to the provinces'. So, I'm from the provinces, in Brighton. We try and help big organisations make sense of what is happening in the social web. Interestingly, many arts organisations seem to be in the game digitally in a much more convincing manner than some of the big businesses.

There's a very nice site which was produced in the light of the hacking scandal called Ask Murdoch and whatever you ask, it comes up with the answer 'I don't have any recollection'. Who could have imagined that a crisis would emerge which went to the heart of News International? It's indicative of the way in which the world is in constant flux, with surprises always around the corner. The world is shifting in big, scary, tectonic ways.

As well as Wikileaks and we have the rise of Brazil, Russia, India, China. We have global economic meltdown, funding cuts, technology everywhere. Ray Kurzweil, a futurologist says that technology will accelerate – we're in the knee of the curve – and it's about to get steeper.

This is our moment. It would be easy to wash our hands of our responsibilities in the light of current difficulties. But it is in times like this that innovation breaks through. The young challenging disrupters can make a difference (and you only need to be one of those three not all of them).

So, building on from what Jerry said, if 'experience is the new marketing', you guys are in the business of experiences. We work with boring technology providers and banks who are looking for ways of making their experiences interesting, but you have such great content matter to work with.

As marketers we need to move on from the idea that marketing is 'the last mile'. There are bigger more exciting opportunities for us.

Can we reconsider ourselves as **story teller, facilitator, curator, community manager or fire starter?**

I would like to talk about three possible themes and practical ways of taking this forward.

1. Scarce experiences

Jerry was talking about intimate experiences. I feel we are entering a world of abundance, a position in which content is approaching free. Competition is global and all kinds of people are competing for attention and time.

What have you got? You have that visceral experiential matter. Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, is one of the first orchestras to declare that they didn't need a conductor. In discussion with the executive director we had a look at an amazing piece of film on the website of them talking to each other. It was a really vibrant discussion, extremely engaging. How can we lift the magic on this sort of engagement?



I would be terrified of going to hear an orchestra because I would think that I need to wear smarter clothes than I have or would sit in the wrong place, but I would pay good money to hear people talking about their work and then producing it.

There's a marvellous video which Jay-Z took on his phone of Beyoncé rehearsing backstage. It was spine-tingling; a rehearsal without all the special effects but completely nailing it. In a world of polish and abundance, what is the raw material we can play with? Even if you are a receiving venue is there a way in which you can use this approach for audiences?

2. Collective experiences

There is an interesting phenomenon around crowd-funding of arts projects. There are some, such as Cornerhouse's funding of their new album, which was over-subscribed, but even more interesting is the way that they have a list of experiences which audiences can buy into with Cornerhouse; the quid pro quo that moves beyond the performance. When we contribute through crowd-funding we start participating from early on, before you get anywhere near the performance. It's also a collective experience – the 'crowd' in crowd funding is significant.

The curator of last year's Brighton Festival, Anish Kapoor, curated a wonderful sea-curve which was on the Downs. People were drawn into this mesmerising moment, with lots of 'normal' people taking photos.



What about recognising that there are these collective experiences? How do we curate them, build them into a mosaic and make use of them? How can you make my contribution as a photographer of this experience be part of a greater whole?

Then people take the art on. So a number of photographers started working on time-lapse photography based on sea-curve, establishing a momentum of its own.

This ties into bigger theme around participation, one which we don't yet understand fully. A guy working for the LA Fire Department thought about how everyone is becoming a sensor – the geographical sense of where a call comes from can be used. How about thinking of every arts participant as a sensor, creator, contributor?

3. The physical web

Increasingly, the web is not in a third party place. It is physical, the tube station we are using, the map of how to get there, and beforehand you could use Google to see what the street actually looks like.

If we think about the technology that is coming soon: 3D, the games consoles which use real space, we are not that far from the sci-fi visions of the future which is more physical and immersive. I can find Brighton Pier, then look at it globally, start ticking boxes alongside places on the map to find reviews of those places, find photos of the places. It might be possible to move beyond the physical confines of our organisations.

My colleague, Jenny Lloyd mentioned History Pin, when we were putting this together. It uses Google Streetview which then places historical images over the top, perfectly placed so that you can see how it has changed.

Finally, the time is now. You probably have the answers.