

Public engagement: to control or not to control ***Discussion panel***

[Jo Taylor, AMA Board Member, chaired the session, apologising that Chris Ward was unable to make it, but introducing Matthew Lawton, Communications Director at National Theatre of Wales (NTW) and Meg Pickard, Head of Social Media Development at Guardian News and Media]

Matthew Lawton is the Communications Director of National Theatre Wales. Previously Matthew worked as a freelance consultant for a wide range of music and arts festivals across the UK and Europe. Matthew describes himself as a social entrepreneur and has always been enthusiastic about changing the way people interact and access culture. Matthew has successfully straddled the live music and arts industry for many years and has become known for creating unique and innovative campaigns that put building social capital at its heart. Matthew has a BA Honours degree from the International Film School of Wales (2002) and completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Management at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in 2008.

He is also the proud owner of the world's only inflatable church and co-owner of the Cardiff Arts Institute venue run by the Something Creatives collective.

www.nationaltheatrewales.org

twitter.com/MattNTW

Meg Pickard is the Head of Social Media Development for Guardian News and Media, responsible for developing and supporting existing and new social web strategy and interactive experiences. She comes from a background in social anthropology and in the mid-nineties conducted ethnographic fieldwork into community participation and cultural identity first in Bolivia and subsequently online. Since then, she has worked in new media including a long stint at AOL, plus consulting roles with a range of small start-ups, global brands and charities. Meg's particular areas of interest are community engagement and the emergence of new forms of collaborative and participatory media, which are inspired by her ongoing curiosity about the cultural, social and psychological aspects of online interaction plus an enduring personal passion for publishing and participating online. She describes herself as a creative geek, is one of the longest-running bloggers in the UK and lives in London and online. You can find her at <http://megpickard.com> and follow her on Twitter: @megpickard.

MATTHEW LAWTON

So welcome, my name's Matthew Lawton, I'm the communications director for National Theatre Wales. Engaged, Innovative and International are our core values. My first ever day working for National Theatre Wales was at the AMA conference last year, so it's great to have an anniversary and be back here twelve months later, twelve months on into a new company that has grown up in this brave new world of openness and transparency.

Today I am going to talk a little bit about how we have let our brand run, and how we have let our community members, digital online, and offline really help shape and shift the National Theatre Wales brand.

So, we're a non-building-based company, we don't have a venue, our first year season of work is our theatre map of Wales, twelve shows over twelve locations, each in unique spaces, sometimes we're on beaches, sometimes we're up mountains, sometimes we're in traditional theatres and traditional venues.

The idea of this twelve month season came from a research and development phase where we asked our online community and offline community through travelling around Wales, where they would want to see shows and from this came a really rich and diverse programme that was tailored to different communities and different geographic locations.

We launched our programme online via a live worldwide webcast, so it was really open. We decided not to have a big fancy party – you can still see some of that launch where we've developed our programme on YouTube and you can watch that there. So, why did we choose online community, why did we choose that to go forward?

As a non-building-based company, this is our café bar, this is the place where we meet, greet and socialise: www.nationaltheatrewales.org. There's so much going on here that over this next ten minutes I really can't give you a real feel what it means to live there, or to know the people that exist there, and I'd really recommend if you really want to feel what it's like to be inside our company to maybe just spend an hour or two there. You can join, or if you don't want to join, then just sit there and observe in the same way that if you were in a café bar, just really get a feel for what our company is about.

There's so much going on. The core element of this community is conversation and we exist as a facilitator and an enabler of these conversations. We're really open, we accept people of different points of view, we actually encourage debate to happen in our community. Since our soft launch in July last year, this is now twelve months old, we've got over 12,000 members, there's various different groups and you can see at the top, right hand side, there's the profile, blogs, events, home, group forum members and so on.

So, I'm going to give you one example of how we decided to let go of control and let go of our brand and really accept and invite other members of the industry and people and venues and theatres, musicians, artists, everybody into the fold of our community.

This is our group section. At the moment we have over 61 different groups. The most active groups are the actors, creatives and writers; this comes as no surprise, because this is where people are sharing ideas and they're getting job roles, they're really making value of our community. We've also opened this up to include Dirty Protest, which is a brand new theatre company and we've got a group that represents our first show, *A Good Night Out in the Valleys*. All the staff at National Theatre Wales have their own profiles, they all speak in their own individual voices. We don't put a limitation on what they want to talk about. For instance, Rhiann in our office makes great cakes and she really likes sharing the things about her cakes, so she talks about that. Myself, I'm not a great blogger, but I like taking photos while I'm on visits, so I take lots of photos for my photoblog. We make it really easy for people to share their information and really easy for people to share photos, videos, blogs and create groups. They can link their blogs and post straight into Twitter and Facebook, so they share those directly with their networks.

This is David Garland Jones. David Garland Jones set up his own group on our community called the David Garland Jones Appreciation Society and I just want to give you a brief insight of what can happen when you let go of trying to control. This is the video that scared me when it appeared on our network, called *The Bench of Hope*.

[Video fails to play but is played later in the session]

At the end we'll go back to our response to this video, and the way that, instead of controlling, we decided not to delete this user's post from the community but to actively

engage in conversation with him via his medium. I really think that's the active thing that we've done – not control but to engage in conversation. So I'd like to invite you to join me on our network. I've created a group called the AMA10 group, where I've posted extra resources and links surrounding the breakout session that we're going to have today and a paper that's been written as a case study on our community since it started back in July 2009. If you go to nationaltheatre.wales.org/communityamagroup, there's a picture of the Jimmy Saville poster outside, so you'll know it. So I'd just like to thank you, really, and just reiterate that thing that the core aspect for us, the challenge is to, rather than control is to engage in conversation and hopefully I'll be able to show those examples before the end of the session. Thank you.

[JT: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Meg Pickard. Meg is head of social media development for Guardian News and Media. She actually has a background in anthropology and has a really interesting role, which I think some of us might be quite envious of, because she works between editorial, technology, marketing, the various different areas of businesses and is therefore able to influence product development and communications, but I will let Meg explain all about that for you.]

MEG PICKARD

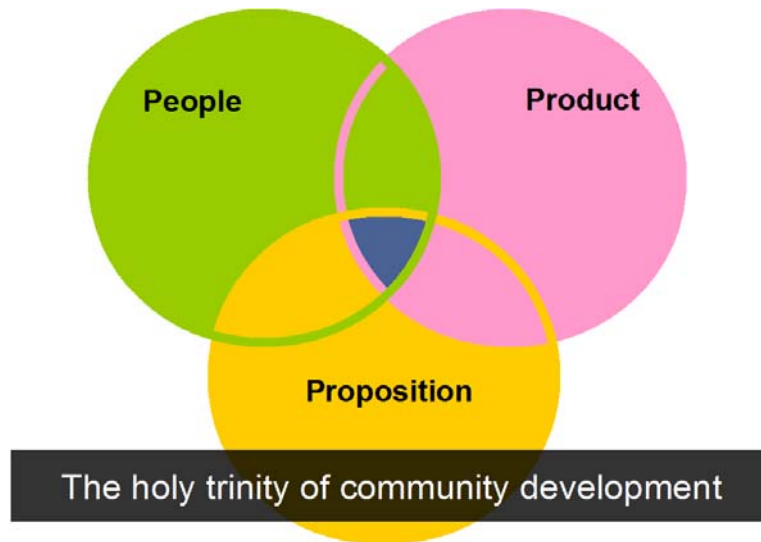
So thanks very much for having me, I'm really inspired hearing Matthew talk about having conversations and encouraging people to engage with an audience. Just one quick example that I've heard, not actually from the *Guardian*, but fairly recently a news organisation in Australia called ABC created a new way of engaging with their readers. They set up a Twitter stream called ABC Investigates, and the idea was that they were going to solicit questions with their investigative journalism unit. They said ask us anything and we will investigate it and they were hoping for people to say, you know, 'why is this lobbyist going to meetings with this politician' and so on. It being Twitter, people were asking lots and lots of questions over the first couple of days that they launched and the questions were, I seem to remember, 'where did I leave my keys', 'does it matter if I'm black or white', 'why does MC Hammer keep saying I can't touch things'. It was a really interesting study for what happened to ABC Investigates, because within 24 hours their brilliant idea had been hijacked by the Australian Twitterati who ran away with it as this great, funny idea, and there was a real challenge for them then to say how do we bring it back.

What they did was incredibly clever and I think very useful. They didn't sort of just say 'stop it, you're being silly, you have to stop it'. Instead they found in the hundreds and hundreds of random questions that people were asking them, daft things, they found the one or two really interesting questions that were there and they answered them straight away, or they said, 'thanks for that, we're going to go and investigate that' and then within 24 hours they came back and said, 'we've actually started to make some progress on the story that was suggested by x or y'.

So that's just a little example of sometimes giving up control can be a really scary thing, but actually if you can do it right, if you can find ways to tame that and bring it back to your side of the conversation or bring it back to your brand, then actually that can work really well.

So last time I was here I came to the AMA conference two years ago at the Sage and I was talking about how important it was to inspire people within an organisation to get involved in social media and how important social media was in helping us to tell stories and so on. I'm happy to say that that part of my presentation is now obsolete, there's no

need to tell people to get inspired, there is no need to get people enthusiastic about this thing any more. In fact two years ago my job was mainly bribing people to come to meetings about social media. I had to provide cake and tea and things in order to get people to come to this meeting about that funny digital stuff. Now I'm a little bit more about channelling the activities and about trying to find the common threads, and to create products and skills that kind of go across the whole of the company.



So, this is what I call the Holy Trinity of community development, but it's actually really the Holy Trinity of what my job involves and what my function involves.

It's partly people which is training skills, making sure that everybody is up to speed, creating resources so that everybody knows what they should be doing, how they can do it, what the tone is and so on.

It's partly about product, it's about designing and working with our user experience team and our designers and our technologists to create interesting products that actually tell or help us to tell stories or help us to work better with communities on and off our site.

But it's also mainly about propositions, which is about figuring out what the editorial imperative is, what's the strategy and how do we then use skills and technology to help that come alive, to help that to be communicated in any environment that we're in and whoever is giving that message out.

So it sounds like it's kind of a very broad job and absolutely it is, on any day it's completely different. I think having a vague job title like head of social media development, basically gives you a licence to interfere, and that suits me completely fine. So one thing I really wanted to talk about was just how we do some of the things. We've got about, let's see, we've got nearly two million followers on our official Twitter accounts, we've got fifty official Twitter accounts, so Guardian news, Guardian media, Guardian jobs etc. We've got about 250 journalists who are tweeting kind of on behalf of the Guardian and then we've got

about 300 other employees of the Guardian, who are also tweeting in their own right. One of the things that we've heard over the last couple of days is this idea of how important it is to get people out there in front of your audience. Part of my job is figuring out how we encourage and enable and empower those people while at the same time making sure that we retain some control over the message, if not the specific delivery of the message, if that makes sense.

So, we basically break it up in three different ways.

We've got the **official accounts for sites and sections**, like I say it's about fifty of those and for those people we provide or for those accounts, I should say, we provide training and support, we make sure that they all use consistent logos and standards, so they're all called Guardian something, they all use the same kind of logo or the same version of a logo, they all have the same background. We make sure that they all fill in their profile right and so we do things that make sure that people understand how it works, so when they're moving between Guardian books and Guardian stage, they understand what the commonalities are. Those are populated by a mixture of human and machine updates, by machine updates I don't mean we've got an army of robots, although that would be handy sometimes. What I mean is we use things like RSS to populate or to push out headlines, but mainly it's humans, mainly it's our editors deciding what to publish onto those streams and the accounts.

We can verify those accounts, even if Twitter doesn't verify them, we verify them by linking to and from our own sites. So we've had, for example, various people who have, I think out of love rather than malice created *Guardian Media* and *Media_Guardian* and *I love Guardian Media* and things, but the only one that we link to is the official one from our site, so that's a way of sort of demonstrating that even though, yes, you can create your other things, as long as you're not actually passing off, then that's fine.

The interesting bit comes when we get into **Recognisable Guardian People** and by that I mean essentially it's like having a byline. So I'm a recognisable Guardian person because I'm very clear that I work for the Guardian; when I say things people associate it with the Guardian, especially because I have to stand on the stage and say things, but other people like that might be editors, might be columnists, might be specific journalists. Charlie Brooker is a good example, or Lynn Gardner; so it's sort of those people who you might say, 'ah, this person is probably speaking on behalf of the organisation'. And so, for all of those people, we put them through a training programme and to support them, which gives suggested approaches, standards and range. What we do not do is give them a list that says: 'these are the four things that you need to do, do not do this, do this'. What we do, instead, is we try and educate them as much as we can about the possibilities and about etiquette and about how to engage in this world and then we let them have a go at it. So we have to give up a bit of control to our own staff in order to let this kind of run away.

The other people are, the **People Who Work at Guardian News and Media**. These are people in HR or marketing or who might work in editorial, but aren't really speaking on behalf of anyone apart from themselves. When they say that they like that cheese sandwich, you know it's not that they're making an official: 'the Guardian has agreed that cheese sandwiches are a good thing!'; they've just had one for lunch and it was quite nice. That's actually handled much more by our normal IT policies, you know, normal use of the internet, rather than as part of our marketing approach.

So we sort of structure this out slightly differently depending on the kind of activity. I guess

the short way of saying that is we don't have one Twitter policy, we have different policies depending on different usage and that, I think, is kind of true depending on whether we're talking about Twitter or YouTube or Facebook or any of those things. We adapt the policies for the particular kind of usage and indeed for the particular kind of conversations that we're having in those spaces.

Zeitgeist

I just really briefly wanted to talk about social attention.

This is an example of a thing called Zeitgeist, which we built fairly recently, that maps social attention, what people are talking about that is on our site, so it's like what's hot, but it's kind of what's hot on steroids. It's a little bit of everything and this kind of information was originally built as an internal dashboard, it was originally built for us to know what people were talking about on the rest of the web that was about our stuff. We suddenly thought there is no point in having this great information, or this really fascinating information, and not actually sharing it with our audience. So I guess the message there is part of giving up control is, it's about transparency, the stuff that you have that your audience may as well have as well. It's not top secret, we're not giving away any numbers, we're not spoiling any surprises, we're instead saying yeah, you should probably know this as well.

Communities already exist ... think about how you can help that community do what it wants to do.

I'm sure you all know who this young man, Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook and this great line, 'communities already exist, think about how you can help that community do what it wants to do.' We call this 'embrace, don't replace', which is another way of saying rather than pretending that you're the only site on the internet, rather than pretending that you're the only theatre or you're the only gallery or the only place that people will ever want to go to, it's better to actually acknowledge people participate in lots of different communities, people have lots of different social networks, they have lots of different behaviours, they use different sites, so we need to figure out how we can work better with those sites and work better with those experiences and make it easier for them.

So a good example of that is we know that people use Facebook, so rather than trying to reproduce all of Facebook's functionality on our site and becoming, I don't know, Granolabook, which I guess is what the Guardian version would be, instead we have to say, well, how do we work better with them, how do we make it easy for people to like stuff on our site, which means that they will tell their friends about it? So, embrace don't replace or, as Jeff Jarvis who's a media commentator says, 'do what you do best and link to the rest'. We're all about the rhying in media these days.

Mutualisation

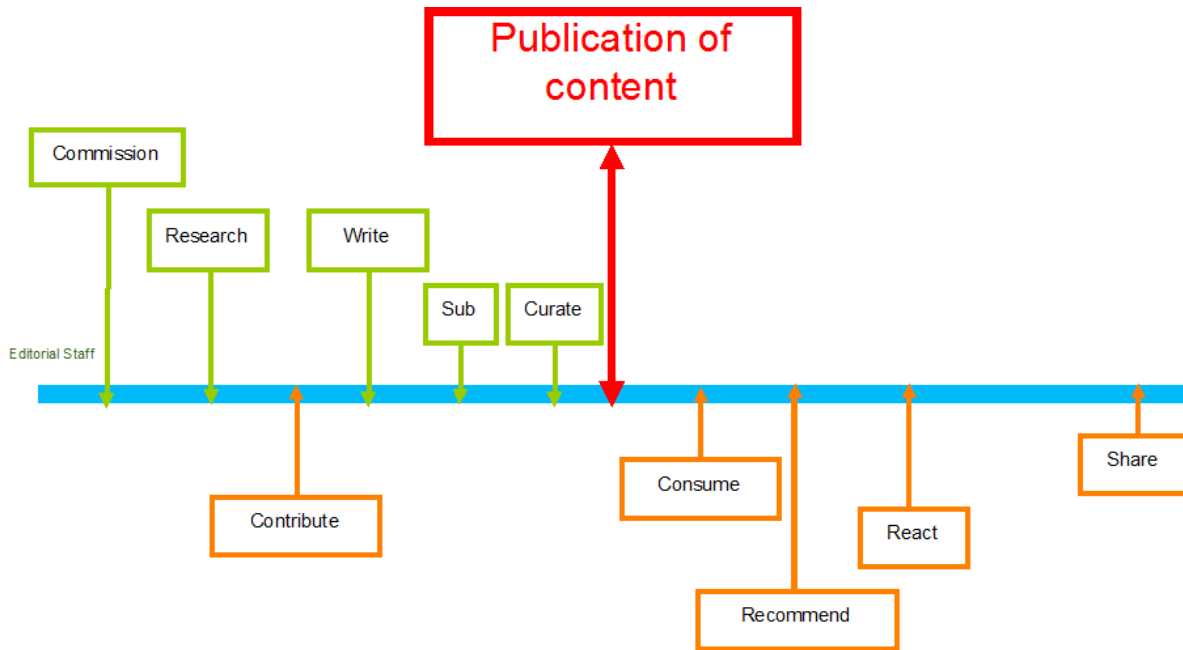
This is an interesting word, mutualisation, it sounds a bit painful and it's not, I promise you, or at least this is what I'm telling everybody in our office at the moment. Mutualisation is a word that has been kind of branded by our editor, Alan Rusbridger, who's really using this as a way to revolutionise and change the way our company thinks. He's written a great lecture about it, he delivered it earlier this year – you can find it if you search for 'mutualisation' in the Guardian, there's quite a few references already online.

Mutualisation essentially means two things.

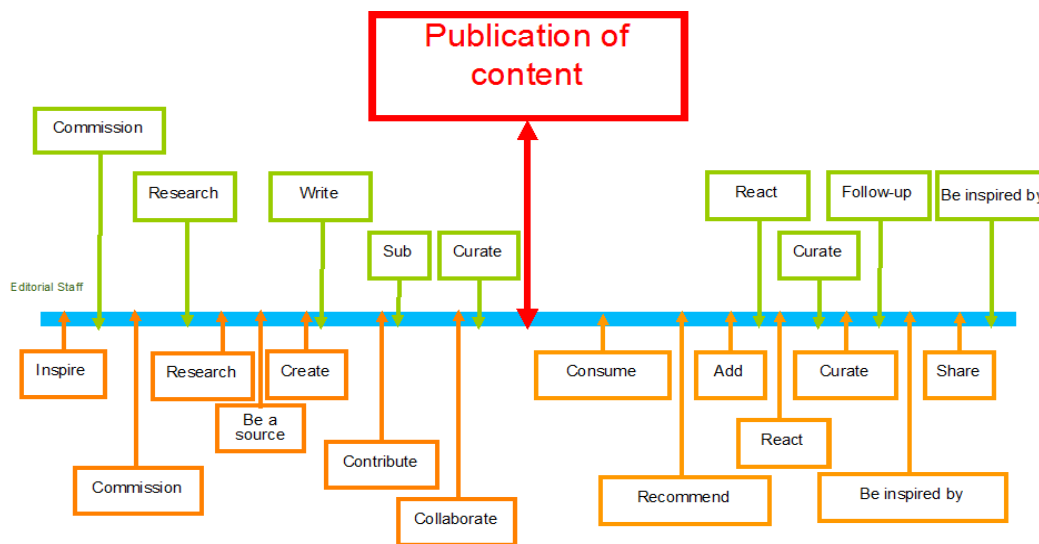
1. Collaborating with readers to better understand, explore or reflect situations, topics,

perspectives or experiences. So it's a way of telling stories together. Working with readers, not just broadcasting at them.

2. A process of organisational change and education, which provides focus for, promotes and supports all of the other things that I just said. So actually we're going through a process of mutualisation at the moment which means that at every editorial meeting we're being challenged to say how would we involve readers in that, how do we get readers involved in helping us to cover this topic – to cover Glastonbury or the Edinburgh Festival, how do we get readers to help us to tell the story, not just as willing, captive audience.



So this is, in our world, this is what publishing used to look like for news organisations. In fact I would say for any kind of content organisation and if you replace the word *publication of content* with *production* then I think it's not dissimilar for your context. So, there used to be the things that happen above the line which is what our staff would do and the things that happen below the line are what the audience would do. Before publication there would be commissioning and research and writing and sub-editing and deciding where things go and laying out and making decisions, (although in your case that could also be rehearsals and setting up and everything), and then someone would hit a big red button, and at that stage the audience would take over. Then it becomes a public thing. Then the audience consume and recommend and react and share and do everything that they want to do. This was old, this is how production of news certainly has been for about 200 years.



These days it looks a little bit more like this, basically there are many more opportunities for users to get involved before you hit the big red publish button. The opportunities are for users or readers in our case to help us: they might inspire us to write a particular story, they might in fact commission us ('we would really like you to cover something'), they might research with us or for us, they might become a source, they might nominate themselves as somebody that knows something, they might bring us ideas, create things with us, help to tell stories, collaborate with us in understanding a situation better, so we can reflect it better on our site and in our pages.

But after publication it's not just still over to the readers, there's actually a responsibility, an ongoing responsibility, for our staff to continue to be involved. What I say to staff is 'don't light fires and walk away'. Or even the definition of somebody who is a good parent is not somebody who managed to have a baby, it's somebody who looks after the baby. The idea that actually staff members are also able to react, they're also able to follow up, to create, to curate ideas – to say 'this is an interesting idea, if I put that together with this, what does that do for us' – and indeed to be inspired by ideas. So actually new publishing offers us new opportunities to work with readers to tell stories and this is sort of what it looks like, not dissimilar to some of the things I think we were hearing before from the Southbank Centre about the new challenges for marketing, the idea that actually a journalist's job is not a linear process of start writing about a thing, finish writing about a thing and then go back to the beginning and start writing about something else completely. Instead it's about continually exploring a particular context.

So, I guess what I wanted to show you just briefly in advance of the conversation that we're going to be having now was just how our organisation is really changing to act differently. We're not just doing a few interesting projects, we are kind of very fundamentally changing our approach to story telling, to interaction with readers and that means changing our ideas about control, changing our ideas about who writes things or about who creates content, changing our ideas about the audience and their role in the process of telling or reading a story. And using that information to kind of push us on, to impel us to keep changing. Not because this is something that we're doing on a whim or that we've just decided is going to make us millions in the short run, but because this is the way that all media is changing and because we have to. Thank you very much.

JT: Thank you. I didn't realise there was quite so much, so I think there'll be lots and lots of conversations to be had, but first of all I would like to ask, do we have Andrew Palmer in the room?

AP: Yes.

JT: Andrew, I understand there's a number of question, but you had a particular question about internal resistance, which would be a good place to start, so if you could ask your question?

AP: Yes, well, you could probably say it in two words, actually in terms of resistance and how to deal with it, because it's clear that it's an organisational shift that's required; it's not something that a marketing team does and therefore the organisation buying in and engaging is absolutely necessary at all levels, otherwise it's not going to work. So, for every organisation within the arts, which is pushing forward on this and doing great things, there are ones with boards or trustees or maybe councillors or even members of senior management team who aren't engaged with it, and obviously marketers should be able to persuade, but there's that process, how do we deal with some of that internal resistance, any top tips in terms of getting a light bulb to go on within organisations at all levels.

JT: Yes, so I think no-one in this room needs convincing about what we need to do, but Matthew, that's an interesting question, perhaps start with you, actually, with a brand new organisation, how did you make sure everybody on the team was on board with this and did you encounter resistance?

MATT

As a new company, it was a key ethos for us to go forward over the next twelve months. We had encountered certain resistance from co-production companies that we've worked with over the past twelve months and the way that we've got them to take on our ethos, and the way of our working, was really to work with them through workshops and really show them, empower them on what techniques they could use to work with them. I don't think that we've encountered so much of that over the past twelve months. I think the resistance is just there for people to get over through experimentation and I'm not really too sure on that from our point of view.

MEG

Can I just speak on our experience?

JT: Please, yes.

MP: Because we, obviously we are not an arts organisation, we're a media business, but I think some parallels are still valid. We have got a legacy business, we are two hundred years old, so in that sense there was actually quite a lot to move, there were a lot of people doing a lot of things that they'd been doing for quite a long time and that included everybody at every level through the organisation. We had to change skills and change minds and all through all of those things I would say there were two things: one of which is what I would call a 'strategy sandwich' – not because I'm an idiot, but just because I like sandwiches – which was basically: you have to have clear leadership direction, clear strategic direction from above, so find your senior sponsors, find people who are high up in the organisation who can actually help you to make that case to their peers and to the board and so on. At the same time find people at other layers of the organisation who can actually help to do it, to actually deliver things. It's not enough just having senior leadership

who say it's a good idea and then nothing happens or lots of people kind of who are perhaps a little invisible to the highest levels of the organisation not being able to actually make a difference. So you have to sort of attack it from above and below. The second thing is experimentation and support. Actually you don't have to do everything at once and that was a really big thing for us, so the internal resistance tended to be towards changing the entire organisation all at once, and the short way of getting round that is to say, 'well then we'll just change this one thing, then we'll just experiment in this one space, we'll just cover this event slightly differently this time and then we'll see how it goes and we might learn from it and we might never do it again or we might actually incorporate that learning to do something different next time'.

MATT

I would say that we haven't always got it right going forward over the past twelve months, sometimes we've got it wrong, but we've accepted that our failures have been played out openly for everyone to see, and we just continue to move forward with the organisation. I think people accept that that there are going to be failures and there will be problems along the way, but as long as you're true to the ethos, the original ethos of your company then that's fine.

JT: Has anybody else had specific experience of facing internal resistance and feels that they've overcome it with any particular techniques or any case studies here in the room? Does everybody in the room feel that they do face internal resistance?

MEG

Yes, but I haven't managed to overcome it.

JT: It's a really interesting question, because I think I would say I have faced internal resistance as well and I found that in talking about what we plan and want to do and what our vision is, I've faced two kinds of responses, one is of massive excitement and support and the other is of resistance and it has tended to be that people who are more happy to experiment and want to push the boundaries and try new things are supportive, you can start to do things with that group and then more people follow, a bit like our dancers on the hill.

MATT

I think for us as a company, we're in an unusual position that we have got the power of two thousand members on our community and there's this kind of barrage of things happening daily and they see the things happening and they see the value in it working for our organisation, so we're able to really push things forward.

MEG

I think there's a challenge though that there is always a temptation to either grab the enthusiasm of the people that really are kind of getting it and interested in engaging and so on and then kind of run away with it, which really risks leaving quite a few people behind and then feeling even further out of touch, even more removed from the reality and therefore probably even more resistant than they were to begin with. The alternative is sort of like hiking, which is you move at the pace of the slowest person in the group, in which case you kind of never do anything or you don't get to climb the mountain, you're spending a lot of time sort of shuffling around. So it's about trying to find that balance and that might mean sending advance parties, it might mean saying 'actually we're going to small bits of the organisation to act in a particular way or to act around business as usual while we understand what the impact of that is on our business', and to get them to report back.

Getting senior people involved in the decision making process and education, I don't mean education as in training manoeuvres, particular skills but actually really talking through the case studies, really talking through and giving examples of how it works in different businesses. So don't think of it as the first step is this giant cliff, actually there must be ways that you could start to incorporate some of those conversations, some of those approaches early on and then sort of work up from there.

JT: I agree and I think actually working out how best to deliver the work, if you have some small successes, the resistance should, in theory melt away.

MEG

Just one other thing, I'm just all about the little Buddhist today, but social media as with engagement and all of these things is a journey, not a destination, you do not finish, so actually the journey is about making the first step, it's about starting. And starting might be in the most minor way possible, creating a Twitter account that allows you to tweet when you've got new productions on your exhibitions and that might be it and you know, just doing it and seeing how you pick up followers might be enough to help to change some of that internal resistance, because it's not about just throwing yourself out there naked straight away, sometimes it's about gradually exposing yourself to these things.

MATT

And if you do want to go naked, then that's fine.

AP: I was just going to add, that's definitely been true for us, but just to give a Twitter example, our artistic director is just so anti Twitter and she just used to say to me, 'I just don't know what the point is, why would anyone be interested in any of this' and I set her up an account, which she hasn't actually tweeted from yet, but she follows about fifty people and now she says 'why don't you do more'.

MEG

That's great, that's a really good example and I think it's also proof that you don't need to force anybody to do anything against their will. Like there is nothing worse than somebody using social media who really objects to it. I'm not going to hold a gun to their head and say you must comment on things, because that will be very obvious when they comment on things. So better to just say, we'll set up the possibility for you to do that and in fact, yes, just as you said, you might first of all use it as a listening device, rather than a broadcasting one.

[Name inaudible], New Wimbledon Theatre. I don't know about you guys, but my perception of Twitter completely changed. I was probably one of the 'what's the point of it?' and I think you smacked the nail on the head with just saying it's a journey, not a destination. I think we're all anxious to make money, to keep businesses open, to keep arts venues going and I think it's a long-term thing. It's almost starting again, building your database again. I think if that's one thing I've learnt is that you kind of have to start at the beginning, you have to start somewhere and I think it's not an overnight thing, which I think a lot of us are hoping, when are we going to sell some tickets, when are we actually going to see money driven from it. It's going to take time and we have to move with it as opposed to hoping that we're going to encourage a lot of return on investment from something that will take a long time.

JT: That's a good point and we discussed it, but it now occurs to me that there's a second question that Andrew had sent in to do with longitudinal research, it might be a good point

to go to that Andrew, if you wouldn't mind.

AP: Had I? I forgot all about that one.

JT: I've got it here if you want me to read it. Your question was, is there any longitudinal research into social media taking place, seeking to access the longer term impact for arts organisations or any other organisations, rather than just evaluating individual projects or campaigns. So, I think some of us feel that maybe we need some stuff to give to people to prove. Meg, do you know?

MEG

In the nicest possible way I think the question is wrong, it's asking the wrong question.

AP: I think it's a question we are being asked.

MEG

No, I'm not saying that you're wrong, Andrew, it's more that I think the question that you're getting from a lot of your teams is: 'where's the proof, where's the proof that I should spend some money on this, because give me the proof and then I will spend the money'. I think actually a lot of the time we need to be pushing back and saying what do you actually want to achieve, because research, we can find research to cover all sorts of things to prove anything at all and I think the timing issue is really interesting, social media is so relatively new and by that I mean ten years – well, and a bit more, probably, if you include things like blogs and message boards and so on – but actually really the last three or four years, so it's a bit too soon to tell where we are with the long term impacts of this. However, I think there are different challenges depending on what you're trying to achieve. So a good example would be do you want to have millions of followers on Twitter, because then you've got a much wider audience that you can broadcast at when you've got any production or a new event coming up, because if you want to do that, then there are different case studies, there are different strategies that you would need to use in order to build that kind of base. Or would you rather have a hundred loyal followers who will guaranteed 100% buy tickets to everything that you do? Which do you want and actually depending on what you want, depending on what your metrics are, depending on what your objectives are, there are different strategies, there's different research that can help you to support and to identify what those things are. I guess I'm just sort of saying there is no one research that says, in fact there is no one person and if anybody comes to your building and says I am a social media guru and I have the answer, they are lying or deluded, because there is no one answer, the point is it depends on what you're looking for, it depends on what you're trying to achieve and those objectives are exactly the same as they always were, they're about reach, they're about loyalty, they're about engagement, they're about relationship building, they're about all of those things, it's just that the media map is slightly different.

JT: Yes, so I think it's possibly the things that we're being challenged on, maybe one of the techniques is to ... if someone asked you that question, that shouldn't be the question to be asked; instead, we should actually be determining the appropriate metrics for our organisation.

MEG

And figuring out how social media can help to, or how the digital world can help to, support those objectives, rather than how will social media fix the fact that people – in our case – how does social media fix the fact that people don't buy newspapers anymore. Well it

doesn't, the point is that by creating relationships of trust, people are more likely to listen to us as an organisation, which means that they're more likely to want to find value in things that we produce, including newspapers.

JT: Some of our colleagues may be simply being distracted by the wrong question and also it can help them ask the right one.

MEG

Yes, it's very shiny as well and you hear people going what's your social media strategy and what's your Twitter strategy, whatever you call it.

JT: I think that part of the whole problem is that we're not encouraging the right answers, because we're getting the wrong questions. I'm going to move onto a second question, do we have Catherine Waddington in the room? Catherine's from We Play.

CW: Hi, I'd just like to clarify that this question was written prior to attending the conference.

JT: Do you know the answer now?

CW: The discussions that have taken place, because I do sound like I've not been here at all for the last few days, and it was around whether we should present common opinion as an organisation or as an individual. We've had lots of case studies and discussions around this, so perhaps just kind of extending it a little bit further, there are quite a lot of people in this room who will have established various accounts as an organisation and are already building that community, but you need to put human value into it and you need to have that person and the name and who they're from, but how do you balance that with continuing to push your brand as an organisation or an institution or project, whatever it might be.

JT: The question about brand and individuals within brands.

MATT

I think from our point of view we really allow our staff to have their own voice. In terms of our brand, we explain the ethos of the organisation at the beginning to everybody, so they know what is within their remit that they can talk about and what they can't, but it is important for us to allow them to have that individuality, and it's interesting that most of our staff contribute to their blogs or their Twitter accounts or their Facebook accounts in their downtime, they don't do it while they're at work, so they do it just to feel part of the organisation.

MEG

If you think of the question: 'Daddy or chips', the answer is surely both, right, you don't have to choose, it's a false premise. So the idea of saying is it the people or is it the brand is well, why not do both? Actually certain people will connect with different types. Certain people really do connect to the brand, so in the Guardian's case people who are really really interested in our stage content or in our books content will find greater resonance or will find good resonance in connecting to Guardian books, because they know that that's going to be the place where they get the news and the updates about Hay and about events and all of those things that go on, but they might also connect with Sarah Crown or Richard Lee who are our books editors, because they have seen their names on a byline and they know that they respect or are interested in their take and their slightly wider conversations. So I guess I'm saying you don't have to duplicate and do absolutely

everything, but there is no one answer, it really does depend and part of that means actually the things that you're trying to get across. Some messages or some activities will come better from a brand than from an individual or vice versa. Some people might feel more comfortable asking an individual the questions, but they don't feel comfortable asking what is sometimes perceived as a building a question. That being said, I think I'm a strong believer that at least on the Guardian site we try really hard to make sure that the people are the brand, you know, that actually everything that our people do, they're not speaking with one kind of brand robot sort of identity, we educate them, we hopefully give them skills and tools and words and things that they can use, we try and empower them as much as we can, we do slap their wrists occasionally when they get things wrong, but we on the whole try and give them, make them into model Guardian ambassadors and that means that they, whatever they say, in whichever context they are, they carry the brand with them, which is stronger than any brand message you can possibly imagine.

JT: I think it's potentially a challenge to how we think about our brands, but even in the olden days which still exist, where we actually write direct mail letters, they go out on your letterhead, but they have, I'm assuming your name at the bottom of it. They are from a human being to a human being and I think this is just the online version of that.

MEG

Yes, in the news context, and it's not strictly relevant in so many ways, but in the news context we've seen absolutely clearly in the last two or three years people follow people, you know, actually when you're talking about the BBC and its coverage of the economic crisis, you know, there was Robert Peston on every programme up in front of every news broadcast, there he was making this thing, he was blogging, he was tweeting, he was doing all of those things. Robert Peston became the face of the story and in some ways that's kind of what we do as well, is actually how do you use your individuals to become the face of issues or the face of a particular, to allow the kind of connections that people don't do with buildings or that they don't do with kind of organisations or bigger events. So actually, an example on our site would be Charles Arthur who is really big on free data and free Ordnance Survey mapping and things like that. So, you know, you can follow Guardian technology and nearly 1.8 million people do, but you can also follow Charles Arthur and you're probably likely to get a different kind of angle, slightly more opinionated, slightly more passionate. He might occasionally mention that he likes a beer, but it's part of him being a real human person which actually means that he gets a better sense of trust from that, you know. It's a bit less news feed and a bit more relationship and that's something that we're very keen to establish.

Paul from Scottish Book Trust. That kind of a division or no need for a division between brand and individual is maybe easier to do on Twitter than Facebook, I'm interested in how you do Facebook, because that's something that we're wrestling with at the moment.

MEG

We do Facebook quite simply at the moment. We have a single page, we have the Guardian on Facebook, basically; Facebook is attached to the Guardian and that contains not everything that we publish, we select stories to go on there that are specifically selected to the conversation or to get people talking or make them want to share with their friends. We also have an environment Guardian page on Facebook and a Guardian football. That's it, we don't put, you know, when I say that's it, I mean I'm on Facebook and lots of my team are and so on, but we're not on Facebook as the Guardian. We don't have to constantly walk round in our Guardian jackets speaking Guardianness to the nation, that's ridiculous and also unenforceable and you know, kind of undesirable as well,

because I happen to work for the Guardian, I also like photography, quite keen on cheese, go walking, I'm not always some sort of corporate borg and I think that it's important that people realise that it's okay to be off stage sometimes, it's okay to actually just be yourself, so on Facebook we've very clearly said there is a corporate identity, there is a brand identity and we do chat back to people, using the Guardian name, also and when we write back from the Guardian we'll say, you know, we'll sign it. Same on Flickr, we've got a Guardian account, but we also will participate as ourselves if we're interested in doing so and we will always always disclose that, it's that transparency that says I work at the Guardian, which is why I'm answering this question.

JT: I'm interested with Facebook are you out about working for the Guardian on your personal profile?

MEG

It's a deadly secret, no-one must ever know!

JT: Is that entirely separate and sociable and nothing to do with work or is there an overlap?

MEG

I think in my case it would be hypocritical if I wasn't transparent about it, so I guess I'm out, because I'm the head of social media development, it would be a bit odd if I sort of pretended that I was something else, but for other users or for other Guardian staff members who happen to be, we surrender to their discretion about what they want to disclose. There is no need for them to sort of come out and say, I've got something terrible to tell you, I work for the Guardian.

JT: But what they do at the weekend ...

MEG

Well, I think that's the thing. I mean Facebook is ... we love it, but it's also kind of clunky and a bit clumsy in the way that it allows the personal and the professional and the public and the private to sort of all bleed together and it's a bit, you're never really sure where something's going and who's going to see it, so this is where I come back to our social media strategy within the organisation: educate people as much as we can about the opportunities, about the risks, about the challenges and then let them make their own decisions about how they decide to use it. What we do say is if you are ever participating in something that is related to the Guardian and you're a Guardian staff member, then you should at least disclose your relationship to the Guardian. So an example of that would be, if we set up a group on Flickr to collect photos of the Glastonbury Festival and one of our journalists is wandering around taking photos at the Glastonbury Festival, uploads them to the group, we should, he should say or she should say, 'I'm a journalist and I'm covering this for the Guardian', because otherwise it's what we would call soft property, actually I think they call it 'astro turfing', which is pretending that there is a grassroots support for something when in fact there isn't and we don't want to do that, because that's really disingenuous.

JT [to Matt]: I know your colleagues are on Facebook, because I'm friends with some of them. Do you have any kind of internal groups, because Facebook is hard to manage.

MATT

We wrestled with Facebook for a while before we set up our page and put that online. I

think we mirror Meg in the fact that we ask people if they're going to post on behalf of us to mention their job role and where they are, but we did wrestle with what we should use Facebook for and why we should be there, because we've already got an online network, so the way that we use Facebook really is to build kind of digital outreach and look at other groups, so if we go into a new area, the best way for us to find out what are the key groups that we need to look at for campaigns are to search within that radius and really kind of pick out people to come on board and pull them back to our own community. So that's kind of our main objective with Facebook and I think the issues of the individuality, there is a really fine line between staff members who want to engage on Facebook but it may not be the right place for them to do that.

JT: I worry about my profile picture and I'm holding a beer in it and it says where I work, but I am allowed to drink and work.

MEG

I mean you do presumably get some time off. Well, I think that's the other thing, we try really hard not to make everybody into some sort of brand robot, actually we employ people who are real people and we want them to act in ways that are reasonable and responsible and helpful without actually destroying the brand, but by trying to support it and that might mean putting disclaimers on things and that happens with blogs, for example, you know, when you've got a personal blog and I do, I do make quite clear that this is not me talking on behalf of the Guardian, it's me talking on behalf of me, but the trouble is that people will always be happy to jump on that and say, oh, she's posted a picture of a cat, that means the Guardian likes cats.

JT: Do they??

MEG

Well, they do, but no more than dogs.

JT: One other question, just to use that as an analogy, say the Guardian did like cats and you liked dogs, if you were to post something like that, how would that kind of work, because we really engage with social media users who are all really opinionated about things, well, I would have to keep a real eye on it, I think if it was more associated with our brand. Do you know what I mean?

MEG

I do know what you mean and basically the question, just in case you didn't hear was about how do you make sure or should you have to make sure that people tow the line or tow the company line about a particular issue or about a particular thing and I think that works in two ways, one of which is as long as people disclose, then they should be allowed to really say what they want, you can't control their every action, that would be like following them round to pubs and saying you're not allowed to pat the cat, because we are a dog organisation or whatever. The New York Times had an interesting example of this where they published their social media guidelines last year and they said in there that their journalists were not allowed to disclose that they were supporters of any particular sport team. I love the New York Times, got a lot of respect for them, but we looked at that, that's really odd, because why would you hire someone to work as a sports journalist who didn't like sports. You know, I'm pretending I know nothing about absolutely anything at all. No, actually a good journalist is somebody who might support Arsenal but is able to suspend that in order to write about Leeds, you know, so they're able to actually not let their personal opinions colour their professional obligations and I think the same is true of

cats and dogs. Actually the company might be all about the dogs and I'm all about the cats, but you know what, that's okay because when I'm at work I love the dogs and that's what we do. I mean it's a way of sort of suspending that. I think the second thing is, we in the Guardian are very keen on trying to sort of talk about the platform and talk about the Guardian is not a corporate line, it's a way of employing and sustaining and supporting a bunch of really interesting individuals, all of whom come with different opinions and different ideas and different approaches and different preferences and things and so as long as we're sort of quite clear with that and we say, you know, your experience may vary, our attitudes, our opinions may vary and that's why we're the Guardian, that kind of supports our brand message, doesn't detract from it. The other thing around that is just you can't control it anyway. So you may as well actually make it part of your policy to say disclose, support and educate. One thing around that though is if we do have a corporate line or a company line about particular things, like for example you should not use Twitter to whinge about the food in the canteen, then if we have lines like that, you know, there are things that we say, do not use Twitter to scoop your journalists or to bitch about other people's stories. If we have things like that, those are absolutes, because they're about professional conduct and potentially harassment and various other things like that and that's slightly different from personal preferences, I like cats, I like dogs. This is actually that is not the place to be having that conversation and we're very strict on it.

JT: I think with those policies in place the people that are nervous internally will feel some kind of comfort that there are some lines that won't be stepped over.

MEG

We step over lines constantly, we are practically line dancing all the time, our attitudes keep changing. I think this is the point about social media is you don't get it right from day one, you keep making it up as you go along and you make sure that you're always slightly ahead of the organisation that you're trying to support. Slightly.

JT: Is Helen Black here?

HB: Yes.

JT: Hi Helen, Helen's got a very ... this is probably quite a quick question, it's a very specific question, but quite an interesting one.

HB: Yes, Helen from the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow and it's a very wee kind of practical question. We track mentions for our organisation and productions online on Twitter. Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea to follow someone who mentions you, but does not yet follow you and that may not realise that we're on Twitter yet? It may be helpful that we follow them, because then we're look, we're here, they could actually have a conversation with us, but it may also seem quite predatory doing that.

MEG

So should you stalk your audience?

HB: Yes.

MEG

My take on that would be, well first of all I think it's okay to track your mentions of your activities or mentions of things that you're doing, I mean tracking is a very useful thing and it gives you lots of insight and so on. I think I would question why you need to follow

somebody that mentions you once, like is it because they've mentioned you once and therefore you think there's an opportunity for a relationship there and that's it? My temptation would rather be, when they mention you, to maybe send them a message, not a direct message, but you know, @Them saying, hey, I saw you, I see that you went to our show last night, hope you enjoyed it, by the way we're here on Twitter too, so ...

HB: Retweeting more ...

MEG

Well, I think that retweeting nice things that people say about you is incredibly gauche, I think it's just the epitome of poor taste, but that's just me, it's like people going, 'somebody just said that they really liked my haircut.' It feels a bit like ... it's a bit in poor taste. However that might be slightly different in other situations, so I guess what I would say is rather than following them straight away, it might be better to actually use that as a springboard for a conversation with them, as an introduction basically and if they start talking to you, then it's absolutely natural that you should follow them and they will probably follow you too, because at that point you've sort of been formally introduced, otherwise it's me standing in a pub, listening to people talk about the Guardian and then kind of attaching myself to it, rather than saying, oh, I hear you like the Guardian, what did you think about that article, did you enjoy it and then us eventually having a drink together, that's a different kind of situation, rather than just randomly eavesdropping and stalking, that's probably not recommended. You can quote me on that.

JT: We have just ten minutes left, do we have technology back? Can we have a go?

MATT

It's probably going to do exactly the same.

Video plays successfully (see it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rasVJ2aQrDM>)

MATT

Yeah, so that was David Garland, it kind of sums up that anything can happen and anything can appear online, but it's how you respond to that really and I'd just like to show you how we responded to that in the same kind of vein, really and the only way that we could do it was to engage in a humorous way and in a way that was in this way, really.

Did you respond on YouTube as well?

MATT

Yes, but it's not on there anymore.

MEG

Is that your decision or YouTube's?

MATT

We decide to continue the debate in our community so we brought it onto, his group, onto David Garland Jones group and put everything there. So this all played when we did the rehearsal, so there we go.

Video plays (see it at <http://community.nationaltheatrewales.org/profiles/blogs/david-garland-jonesbeyond-the>)

MATT

Yes, so there you go, *The Bench of Hope* and *Beyond the Bench of Hope*. What's happened with David Garland Jones now is this initial engagement has lead him to go forward into our submission process and it's best to check out some of David Garland Jones other videos as well to get the humorous side of this. Thank you.

MEG

I think there's just one note that I would like to say there which is just that context is everything in this, that as you say it's looking at David Garland Jones other activities and knowing that he was going to be able to get the joke, knowing that he was actually going to get it in the spirit in which it was entitled, because it can seem, you know, even if, it's good to be able to respond in kind, it's good to be able to respond in a jokey way if someone jokes with you, but sometimes the might of a big organisation joking with an individual or teasing or any of that kind of thing can feel really disproportionate.

MATT

Yes, I think people need to see the context of some of the other videos to get a feel for why we responded in that way.

MEG

And I think in that sense it's absolutely appropriate, I guess I'm just saying that if it was the first experience that you had of this person, well, sometimes you get it, people with us on Twitter or in the Guardian or whatever will say something snipey about the Guardian and if we were snipey back to them, the Guardian being snipey to an individual which is a really weird thing to do and feels a bit like it's sort of unfair and I think in that case it's reacting kind, but in the same spirit as well as the same kind of medium.

JT: So to take it off YouTube, because someone has seen that on its own ...

MEG

Well, someone seeing that on its own might think well there's no point submitting to the National Theatre of Wales, so as long as it was clear on YouTube, that this was in response to ...

MATT

That video came from his channel, rather than ours.

[JT wraps up]