

**Rohan Gunatillake, Missions Models Money in conversation with
Marcus Romer, Artistic Director, Pilot Theatre
*Using digital media to develop artistic content and public
engagement***

Rohan Gunatillake is a Director of Missions Models Money (MMM), a nationwide transformation programme which looks at the ways the arts use their resources in response to the realities of the 21st Century. Until recently he led the Web Connect strand at NESTA and before that worked for IBM as well as spending five years with Accenture's consulting practice. Rohan has a particular interest in mission-led organisations and has acted as an informal strategy advisor for a number of social enterprises and ethical businesses. He has a passion for the live experience especially in the form of experimental theatre, new writing and loud music.

Marcus Romer is Artistic Director of Pilot Theatre, the national touring theatre company based at York Theatre Royal. His production of *Lord of the Flies* has had five national tours received a TMA award nomination and won a Manchester Evening News award. He is also a published playwright and has adapted and directed the world premiere of Susan Hinton's cult classic *Rumble Fish*. He created the opening event at the 2007 IIFA Bollywood Oscars at Sheffield Arena for a live audience of 15,000 and a TV audience of 500 million. He was invited to attend the TED conference in California in 2007 where he furthered his interest in technology in the arts. On returning he formulated the *Shift Happens* Conference in the UK.

In this interactive session, Rohan and Marcus talked about how new technology, and in particular social media, might be used throughout the sector in the development, production and marketing of the arts. The debate will consider how digital media might help us to innovate with regard to both artistic content and audience or visitor engagement. They will use their own experience and practice to show how they are exploring and creating parallels between the creative process of developing theatre for performance and experimenting with digital technology to find new ways of doing things.

I'm not a geek

Delegates were invited to leave their mobile phones on. Rohan then introduced the subject.

Some interesting things have come from the keynotes for example: Andy's plea for simplicity and Dave's encouragement for us to be interesting. We will try and do both of these things.

I'm not a geek. In my old job, I was half inside a digital bubble of Mac Book toting, Twitertastic social media and on the other hand, I was working with government and businesses which wanted to understand this new world better. I was a kind of translator in the middle.

If there had to be a tagline for this session it would be 'evolve your audience'. It's about listening and helping them to move from passive recipient to become an active collaborator. This is something which has been made possible by the web. The web is helping us to relearn natural human behaviours at scale.



Tim Berners Lee's original intention for the web was that it would be a many to many communications system. This was how the web developed and it was a radical change. What we are seeing now due to the number of people online is not just about document to document as person to person. When 13 year olds are playing Halo 2 with massive online communities around the world they are learning about real time collaboration.

Many of the web's recent commentators (such as Charles Leadbeater and Clay Shirky) talk about three general modes: **tell, talk and do** or Connection Conversation Collaboration.

So, for arts organisations, the web was originally seen as a 'push' mechanism, connecting with people and giving them information or broadcasting to them. Then we had the idea that you can have a conversation with people – a social media strategy and now we see the web as a way of making collaboration happen – co-producing.

For example, Meg Pickard of The Guardian recently said:

'The Guardian doesn't see itself as a newspaper with a website, doesn't think of itself as a website with print, it sees itself as a news and content provider that happens to distribute itself on different platforms.'

We're in a unique period in which the rate of change has been exhausting. Can you remember what life was like before email? Or life before mobile phones? Or life before Facebook?

What are all these people doing online?

Networks form round social objects – we don't talk about nothing. This is the same online as it is offline. I was having lunch with a few people today who were saying that one of the things they liked about the AMA conference is that it made them realised that they weren't alone. It was like a form of Group Therapy.



YouTube is based around video and Flickr is based around photographs, but then they each developed the ability for people to connect and integrate around those subjects.

No-one has better objects to socialise around than arts organisations and arts audiences love talking about the art. This has always been the case, just like Andy Ryans' example of standing around chatting outside the concert hall. Now, with Twitter, we have the opportunity to do this online and at scale.

Collaboration needs a well-defined task

The conversations are happening, it's just a matter of finding and facilitating them.

When I was at NESTA we worked with Virgin Atlantic to help them develop social media around their passengers. At first they had a rather cold attitude to them, referring to them as 'pax' – freight basically. We helped them to realise that this was a captive audience all having a very specific shared social experience. Everyone is going to the same place together so we did a bunch of clever things with them.

Conversations become collaboration by giving people defined things to do – dropping a task in for people to socialise around.



Agile networks can do amazing things. Twitter can facilitate 'tweet ups' in which people meet face to face. For example, someone called Amanda Rose turned one of these Tweet Ups into a 'Twestival' by asking attenders to contribute £5 on each occasion which was then given to a charity campaign for clean water in Africa. They raised \$500,000 dollars in a few weeks across the USA.

You are making weak ties into stronger ones through trust. Marcus and I only met last night but because we had been communicating with each other for a long time we able to talk to each other immediately.

There aren't many examples in the cultural sector of the ways that these processes have been opened up, though it's great when we do hear about them, like the examples at the Cornerhouse. The other good thing – is that there is plenty of opportunity for learning from other sectors.

Not everyone will write a libretto for you in next year's programme, but that will be a very high value person for you. It's like the way you treat your donors – they are high net worth individuals.

I will finish with this quotation:

"Communication tools don't get socially interesting until they get technologically boring."

[Rohan then handed over to Marcus]

It's not about technology it's about people

I don't understand how many technologies actually work, just as I can't mend my car if it breaks down, but I can try and use my knowledge to take people on interesting journeys.

Some of the brightest people don't work for your organisation. For example, one of our actors created a Facebook group. We didn't have to worry about it, manage it, look after the information etc.

This is Pilot Theatre's presence in Second Life.



We put the set on there and people could walk around and explore what's happening. If MySpace was a country it would be the 5th biggest in the world. One of the Pilot MySpace sites was constructed by a 15 year old and was much better than some of the professional material created for websites. In fact it won an award from the TMA.

Marcus Romer played a video about wikis and how they work

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY&feature=fvst]

Wiki pages are interesting because they are a way of creating a space on which everyone can share information, update, edit, create work. I've put one together at <http://ama2009.wikispaces.com/> and I encourage you to go and have a go and try out wikiwork for yourself. It will remain active for a long time. Please let people know about it and everyone can try it out.

This (right) is what most conferences look like these days. There's quite a low technology threshold at this conference; there isn't much twittering going on, which isn't a criticism.

Live streaming is an important technology. People can see/hear what is going on around the world.



As with videos in the eighties, which didn't kill off the cinema, this isn't going to kill off live performance and happenings. It is much more likely to enhance live performance by encouraging interest.

We're doing a project in Second Life with Derby University. If you'd like to have a go and inhabit it drop me a line and I'll tell you how to get in. I'm still pulling in YouTube videos to this so there are further connections. It has real distance and measurement so you can do things like look at the way the stage might work with different lighting, perspective etc.

How do we engage people? *As well as the four p's we should recognise that it's pull as well as push.*

Also worth thinking about:

- ISUU
- Twitter Search
- Audioboo (an app on iPhone)
- Survey Monkey

It's about joining up the dots, it's not about technology, it's about people.

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Emily Till (chair of session): I think what I've learnt is not to be nervous about not knowing about the technology and the correct terminology etc.

MR: Simon [Drysdale] said this morning that the report of the conference would be online in September ... *or today* depending on which one you go and look at – you could see what's happening by using Twitter search or looking for #ama2009 on Twitter or visiting our wikispace site.

Questions/Discussion

Delegates were encouraged to talk to each other about the seminar followed by questions.

James Blackford, BFI: One thing for me is a question about how much substance can you gain in two lines of text. You could have a whole page of discussion about the AMA conference but how engaging is it when people say – 'oh this seminar was great'. Is there a limitation?

MR: You post links into the tweets so yes it is a short caffeine shot, but people can post in other links. For example, I put in an Audioboo with someone who I met this morning – a little live interview.

RG: Twitter is a platform so there is no one way to use it and there is a lot of dross there. It's an ambient technology so you can dip into it anytime. If you start following things that you are interested in you'll probably start seeing the value of it.

Emily Till: I went to look at the artswetraining.com site and there were some great and very simple instructions about how to use the technology. For example, I found it very interesting to find out how the Sage Gateshead was being talked about.

[Unidentified questioner]: We are in the process of putting together our website. Some of this might or might not include high quality audio and video. Should we include this in the site or share it on YouTube.

RG: You could do both – you could put it on YouTube or Vimeo and then embed it into your site too but it depends partly on whether you want to share it.

MR: We tweeted out some questions this morning. One of them was ‘how do you measure the impact of social media?’ – and we have an answer from Jenny Jackson in Bradford referring us to Measurement Camp (<http://measurementcamp.wikidot.com/tools-for-measurement>) so someone has helped us through this.

RG: This morning a question went out about ‘who is the best person in the organisation to do the tweeting?’ Tom Atkins from the Old Vic responded saying ‘the person who is most passionate about it’ so it doesn’t feel like a chore.

I’m a commercial director. I understand the power but I’m cautious about the effect it has on the business because we can’t control the messages that go out.

ET: I was speaking to someone last night who described herself as a ‘gobshite’ and I’m good at doing this sort of thing for the organisation. She said she was worried about the fact that people could post negative comments. She found that someone posted a very political comment about an event they were holding which worried her to begin with but then the community rallied round and criticised the comment itself on the same site.

Dick Penny, Watershed: If anyone thinks they have control of the flow of information is bonkers. Look at what happened in Tehran. If you go and look at what is out there people are already talking about you and making all sorts of comments. So I think – let go.

RG: There is a difference if it is your site. I like what Jimmy Whales from Wikipedia says: it’s one part democratic because anyone can put things on there, one part meritocratic because the best rises to the top, one part aristocracy because there is a small group of super users, one part anarchy and one part monarchy because I can press the button and delete it.

[unidentified questioner]: If you apply Twitter to market events, should you do it as the organisation or as an individual.

RG: Personally, I think it’s better if you ask people to follow the organisation because it is easier and more straightforward but there are different views on that.

Trish Thomas, Southbank Centre: Is there a problem about international property, such as the recent Wikipedia National Portrait Gallery.

A discussion ensued about the consequences of some of the NPG collection being put on line and The National Gallery’s app Love Art.