

## Keynotes

### DK, Founding Director, MediaSnackers

#### *Zen and the heart of social media*

DK is the founder of MediaSnackers, a term coined in early 2006 to describe what young people were doing with media. The site (<http://mediasnackers.com/>) was launched in June 2009. His background is in education, communications and media and when working in local government was the UK's first and only Corporate Youth Officer. DK comes from the initials of his old name (which he didn't like much) when one of the first young people he was working with called him DK.

In this opening keynote, DK examined how digital technologies are changing the public experience of the arts. He offered perspectives and insights into current online techniques and practices, detailing how today's multi-media world is changing the way people behave and interact with organisations. Sharing case studies from his work across a range of sectors, he highlighted key learning points for arts organisations and demonstrated how the arts might respond to this change in society.

#### Zen and the heart of social media

DK began by announcing the launch of his new book, *'Zen and the Heart of Social Media'*, which was to be launched the following day (1<sup>st</sup> December 2009). It includes a collection of sayings and mantras from the MediaSnackers team. It's free online to read for three months.

This presentation is based on the chapter headings of the book.



#### **Social media is about people**

Brands, organisations, companies, museums, theatres can't blog or tweet, someone (a person) has to take on this role. It's really important to be a person. Who are you? Come out from behind the curtain.

[DK played an excerpt from *The Wizard of Oz* in which the wizard is seen to be a humbug and a bad man for hiding behind the curtain].

#### **The how is more important than the what**

When we look for ideas, creating models from cross-sector case studies, we always look at *how they are doing* it rather than focusing on *what they did*. Once you look at *the how*, you create a model which can be used for application in your own work. For example, you could learn from a project led by MediaSnackers called 'Pacific Youth' in which a six week social media project was delivered to the other side of the planet; it's much more useful to look at how this was achieved – animato, slide casting, blogging etc – and then pinch the interesting ideas – rather than concentrating unnecessarily on what was done.

### **Focus on outcomes not output**

Most people focus on the wrong part of the story. They look at the service or the end product. It is much more important to be sure that you are achieving what you would like to achieve. Are you achieving your goals? Can you draw a line from anything you produce to its impact?

On mediasnackers.com a third of all the referrals come through Twitter. This information helps the team to develop what is important. Any digital media strategy needs to focus on the outcome. If it's not working, try something else.

### **It's not a mountain to climb but a wave to catch**

This is about attitude. In many of the courses that MediaSnackers run, there are people who put up barriers based on fear of the way that social media works. They don't understand it and think there is a huge mountain to climb. However, the wonderful thing about social media is that it is like a series of waves. One social medium may be all the rage today but there'll be another one tomorrow. These are waves coming in, catch the next one. Storms pass, mountains rarely move.

### **Direct your message don't spread it**

A great deal of marketing concentrates on getting a good spread. Social media enables you to be much more direct – can you direct what you are doing?

For a recruitment project we used Twitter to find customers, audiences, clients. We put in 'just lost my job' (and similar phrases) into the Twitter search engine, then refined it geographically, which immediately identified a group of people for free that might be interested in the initiative. It doesn't cost anything; just a little bit of thought and time.

### **Playing is learning by stealth**

MediaSnackers doesn't train anyone, people are allowed to play and explore and discover. If you are a boss of a department, give your staff time to play. It's an effective learning strategy for organisational and staff development in the modern world.

[DK played a video excerpt from a game 'The Unfinished Swan' (due to be released in 2010), in which you need *to make a mess in order to progress*]

We refuse to write digital marketing strategies for people because first of all, organisations need to understand social media and the digital world. To do this, they need to experiment and make their own explorations.

### **A bad idea is one that's never shared**

It's important to create space for ideas to bloom. Not just in your immediate group but cross-departmentally and taking in a variety of perspectives. What are the communication lines for the sharing of ideas in your organisation? Do you use free social media platforms to encourage conversation or collaboration: wiki documents, internal blogs, Google docs? It means that all departments can know what's going on, share minutes quickly and easily. Social media should help you save time so you can come to a meeting with the ideas already partly formed.

## **Echoes never tell you anything new**

There are many echo chambers, but saying the same things and talking in the same spaces won't lead to innovation. Seek out fresh conversations and avenues for exploration and if you are looking at other peoples' work, take the 'how' not the 'what' from your observations.

## **Constraints liberate your imagination**

MediaSnackers worked with Liverpool Everyman Theatre on a mobile-vouchers campaign to persuade people to come to a play called 'Proper Clever'. Little videos were produced for mobile phones created by the writer. They were reproduced for free using Bluetooth so that young people were able to share them phone to phone. Anyone who came along to the box office and showed that they had the video on the phone had a reduced price ticket – 200 did this – after only a short campaign.

## **Show don't tell**

Rather than telling people about what you are doing (in press releases for example) social media enables you to show people what you're doing.

[DK showed a recording of a project in which they worked with young people in Milton Keynes. They recorded comments on a simple mobile phone with some of the filmed responses being presented in a meeting instead of the usual option of writing a report.]

Could you do this sort of thing with people leaving your theatre, gallery etc?

## **To go forward look sideways**



Don't stop writing press releases, but rethink how you do them. Ford use Social Media Press Releases (<http://ford.digitalsnippets.com/>) in which RSS is used so that people can subscribe to their most up to date press releases; they also have links to other social media such as blogs in which people are talking about Ford. One of the youth workers on a MediaSnackers project, who was working with socially phobic young people, had an idea about using MySpace and Skype to facilitate communication and socialising. It wasn't something we'd have thought of but they knew better how it could work. Keep looking sideways for great examples.

## **Process over product**

Talk about what you're doing rather than what you've done or what you have. We're writing a book so we talked to people about the difficulties of writing a book, months ago. When we were looking for an image for the front cover of the book we put out a call for help and someone offered a front cover through one of our networks. If we'd waited until the book had been completed we wouldn't have built up such an audience for it.

## **Design from the actual rather than the perceived**

MediaSnackers was going to produce a campaign for youth workers' social media because it was a perceived gap in social media networks. Then we discovered that a youth worker had decided to start writing a blog (following a MediaSnackers day) and had told someone else and a network developed. We had shouted so loud that they had decided to do something

about it – they decided to try it out themselves – and so we had to cancel our campaign. Strategies mean nothing if you don't know what you're doing.

### **It's called MySpace for a reason**

Don't just jump in. Be careful of invading peoples' spaces and selling to them. By all means direct your message if you'd like, but be respectful. They are there to connect with other individuals.

### **Real life has more bandwidth**

All this stuff is great but nothing beats real life. We get together and share time, create events and people meeting people. Social media doesn't replace everything.

### **It's about what's best not what's new**

This is what started off the idea for the book; the quotation from Robert Pirsig:

*"What's new?" is an interesting and broadening eternal question, but one which, if pursued exclusively, results only in an endless parade of trivia and fashion, the silt of tomorrow.*

*'I would like, instead, to be concerned with the question "what is best?" a question which cuts deeply rather than broadly, a question whose answers tend to move the silt downstream.'*

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, *Robert M. Pirsig, p. 98*

There are so many exciting new opportunities but there are many things that still can't be beaten. Identify what serves you best.