

Film Australia in association with ScreenWest presents

doco 2012 dialogues

DOCUMENTARY AND THE DIGITAL FUTURE

WHAT DOES THE REVOLUTION LOOK LIKE? SPEECH BY TIM FLATTERY

A diversified and fragmented audience is creating new markets for CONTENT.

But will this work for DOCS? //

Or as a striking writer more eloquently expressed it: "The revolution will NOT be televised. It will be downloaded." //

So what does the revolution actually look like? //

Well it looks like the inexorable decline of broadcast TV audiences around the world over the last 25 years //

And 6.2 million Generation Y viewers who spent an average of 22 minutes watching MTV online last November //

It also looks like the exponential increase of media channels since 1966 //

And the shocking truth that Australians 18 months ago started spending more time on the Internet than watching TV //

Even though Australia's current broadband speeds don't even put us on the top ten list //

The revolution also looks like the multi-millions of dollars already invested in online TV that culminated in You Tube serving 100 million videos per day by July 2006 – and Google buying You Tube for \$1.65 billion dollars soon after. //

By December 2007, 141 million Americans watched 10 billion online videos in a single month //

And Will Ferrell's online comedy skit, The Landlord, gleaned 50 million hits from around the world //

Which of course meant U.S. TV executives finally woke up with ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox earning \$120 million from downloaded shows and \$1.3 billion in advertising by the end of last year (whilst originally offering writers, I might add, \$250 a year for each streamed episode). So what got their attention? Its simple - Advertisers. //

In 3 short years US advertisers will be spending \$4.3 billion against online video inventory. No wonder the writer's guild held out for and got a better deal! //

So now we have a bare knuckle brawl for the living room on our hands. In one corner you have Google – a \$165 billion company – stealing eyeballs via You Tube from the existing TV networks. //

And in the other corner there is Microsoft – a \$270 billion company – whose recent launch of a TV software product called Media Room – will give Chairman Bill Gates access to the screen he really wants – the one in your living room. //

Gates' predictions for owners of existing TV networks are nothing less than dire.. and I quote:

"TV will finally mesh with the Internet to form a new experience that combines the traditional richness of video with the interactivity of the Web.

'As currently set up, broadcast television, which shows the same programming to everybody, will find it hard to compete with Internet TV that opens up limitless selection, tailored to individual preferences. Like newspapers and directories, there is dramatic change for TV in the next five years.'

Now no one is saying this limitless selection of content will all be quality and drive the human race forward //

I often worry the Internet is in fact sending the human race backwards... and no doubt... some of the ITV content available now is very //

I said, VERY questionable!! //

But we WILL be watching anywhere and everywhere. More IS already more. //

And of course this particularly applies to documentaries... because topics once thought of as 'niche' – those projects you know for sure should have been commissioned but weren't - will find a platform as brands like Discovery//

The BBC and others broaden their content tastes on line and on- demand //

Because the freedom to choose isn't just a cool new media idea.. it's a fundamental right //

And the digital future of 2012 has no role for Citizen Kane programmers who control what we watch and when we watch it. //

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WHAT DOES THE REVOLUTION LOOK LIKE? SPEECH BY TIM FLATTERY —cont.

In fact according to the University of Southern California's Technology Centre there will only be two kinds of TV in the future: event-television and on-demand television. Which means the map of the TV world will be re-drawn from one based on geography //

This one. Where you sell horizontally - territory by territory.//

To one based on global social networks where you sell to vertical audiences passionate about all kinds of previously niche topics - //

Put simply – the future of TV resembles an endless Borders bookstore – with shelves of niche content available whenever you want it //

And in this 'niche-casting' future even a Bruce Beresford doco will get a greenlight! A short quote from his recent book illustrates the frustration we all have with the current status quo that FORCES us to produce doco's for audiences of the middle majority. And I quote Bruce: "I got an email to say Discovery Channel have rejected ALL of my ideas for the documentary about modern Australia. Hard to credit that Discovery wants nothing but the usual Aussie stuff – outback, drunks, road trains, crocodile hunters and surf carnivals. I can't say I'm sorry. I don't much enjoy committee film-making". I for one would love to see Beresford's take on Australia and I'm sure I'm not alone. The on-demand future will allow this to happen. //

But don't wait for 2012 to roll around... In the paper I'm writing to go along with this speech the two case studies I'm using in fact come from 2007 //

The first one, Diamond Road Online, produced by Kensington Communications in Canada, is a leading-edge synthesis of documentary, online community, and the Web 2.0 techniques of Collaborative Filtering, and Personal Recommendations – the exciting techniques behind popular sites like Flickr, Amazon.com and Del.icio.us. The other project I'll be featuring is in fact the documentary channel I watch most frequently – not Discovery, not National Geographic and not the ABC //

It's an online doco channel called VBS – with the catchy tagline – "saving your eyes from the blinding pain of television." I'll let the guys from VBS, including Creative Director Spike Jonze, have the last word //

"VBS is an online broadcast network. We stream original content, free of charge and 24 hours a day. We carry a mix of domestic and international news, pop and underground culture coverage, and the best music in the world. People have used words like eclectic, smart, funny, shocking, and revolutionary to describe VBS.

With Academy Award-nominated director Spike Jonze as our creative director, original content from a veritable United Nations of contributors, and bureaus in 20 countries, VBS has hit the planet in a manner not unlike a massive global plague. Streaming on VBS's signature "in-room" widescreen and remote, content will be available all the time, on-demand.

Basically, VBS will exploit every utopian vision the internet has thus far failed to live up to. Thanks for watching. //
The world truly is your oyster
Let the games of 2012 begin..

Thank you.



Tim Flattery

Tim Flattery holds the dual titles of Head of Brand-Funded Content for Mitchell Communication Group and General Manager of Digital Artists – Mitchell's Internet TV innovation group. Prior to his appointment Tim spent two years as Head of TV and New Media Development for Becker Entertainment, working with cable clients in New York, Washington and Los Angeles. Tim first started working in the internet in 1993 where he led online classified advertising initiatives for Australia Consolidated Press's Trader Division. In 1996 he launched the well known social forecasting and new media development firm Pophouse and was Managing Director until 2003. He sat on the board of The Australian Futures Foundation between 2000 and 2002 and published his first book Ideas Generation in 2001.