

Channel 4 – Events
Channel 4 Education Briefing
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Welcome and Opening Remarks

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Hello, everybody, and welcome to our Education Briefing. I am Head of Education and Managing Editor of Commissioning here at Channel 4. Today is really a chance for us to outline the ambitions and opportunities for 2010 and to give you an idea of the sorts of things that we are looking for. We are also going to talk about recent projects, because we have learned a huge amount in the past year and identified quite helpful pointers to the next year or so.

I feel very confident that Channel 4 Education has made the right move away from simply making television programmes, and we are very happy that our education projects are now definitely reaching the TV audience that we are aiming for rather better than they used to. It is particularly exciting too that we are increasingly exploring the games world and looking at the education opportunities that games offer.

I would also like to take the opportunity today to thank some of the brilliant companies that we have been working with over the past year. Not only are the shelves now groaning with awards but it is fair to say that these are fantastic collaborations. These are very new projects and no one is quite sure at the outset how it is going to turn out. The companies have worked so collaboratively with the channel that it has been fantastic. Our projects are new and are definitely risky. They succeed best when they evolve in response to the audience. Those collaborations between Matt, Alice and the various companies involved all add to that.

Before handing over to Matt and Alice, we will show you a brief collection of some of the projects that we have been working on over the past year.

[Video presentation]

Education's Commissioning Plans

Matt Locke

Commissioning Editor, Channel 4

Alice Taylor

Commissioning Editor, Channel 4

I. Preamble

Matt Locke

I will talk briefly about some of the things that we have learned from some of the projects that we did last year – things that we have done right and wrong. We are still learning and want to continue to learn from all the remaining projects this year and next. The challenge that we set ourselves was around how to gain the attention of our teen audience. Attention is what is in short supply, particularly from the teen audience, and it is particularly difficult to gain their attention with more public-service educational messages. This year, we are experimenting with three things:

- How to gain their attention.
- How to keep their attention.
- How to measure the impact that we have on this audience.

Alice will then talk about what we are looking for in terms of next year.

Henry Jenkins has written a far better and more erudite description of everything that I am about to say in a series of blog posts. He was commissioned, together with another researcher, to carry out some research for MTV and others in his old job at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the USA. He has written a series of eight blog posts entitled 'If it doesn't spread, it's dead', which really looks at how and why people share content among social media networks, what it means for them and what kinds of content really work in these new environments. His blog posts are very academic but quite accessible and well worth reading.

II. Gaining Attention

The whole point of this year is that we were not gaining attention in the morning schedule. Channel 4 Education does not have the kind of things that Channel 4 normally uses to gain attention from its audience: we do not have peak-time slots; we do not work with huge on-screen talent; we do not have massive above-the-line marketing and support from the channel. Many of the things that the channel usually uses to drive attention are not available to us, so we are experimenting with new ways of gaining attention, finding our audience and engaging them in our projects.

One of the first things that we have really learned this year is that we used to commission for schedules. Everyone understood the context of the audience: they would be sitting at home watching a programme; you would ‘hammock’ public-service-value programmes in between entertainment programmes; and you would know the context in which you were commissioning for attention.

Increasingly, over the last five years or so, people are commissioning sites, putting big projects onto the web and trying to drive people to that site. Our audience in particular experiences the web as a stream. They probably use four or five sites for about 80% of their attention on line – sites like Facebook, iTunes and YouTube – and they really come across new content as part of a stream. It might be a stream in response to a search query on YouTube or Google; it might be a stream of updates in Facebook; it might be a Twitter stream. However, their experience of the web in terms of the first time they tend to come across a new piece of content is not to go to the site that you have created; you have to go out and find them in these streams of content. We are, therefore, increasingly starting from the point of view of gaining their attention by thinking how our projects integrate into these streams and into the way that teens are using and understanding the web.

III. Keeping Attention

Once we have understood how to gain their attention, how do we keep it? This is something that we are still experimenting with and it is very difficult. This audience’s attention is incredibly fleet and dynamic, and it is very difficult to have them return to a project. We have done three projects this year – *Year Dot*, *Battlefront* and *Slabovia* – that have been running for about a year, and it is very difficult to have people come back time and again. *Slabovia* did it in a very interesting way, by building SlabSpace, which is a mini social network, where people create their own avatars and identities and regularly issue challenges.

It also uses a good newsletter approach, which *Battlefront* does too. Key to keeping their attention is understanding how to have people contribute something of themselves very quickly, such as an email address. There tends to be a very high barrier to entry for user-generated content. Few people upload images or videos; mostly, people will poll a vote or leave a comment. We try to find ways of simply opening some kind of regular communication channel with them. It might be via one of their streams as a group within their Facebook account, or a Twitter stream that they follow. You may be able to have them sign up to something a bit more editorial, such as a newsletter, but finding ways of opening a regular communication channel with them is absolutely essential.

The second key factor is to leave footprints on the site that show what other people are doing. Teens quickly realise what sites have no activity around them. Flickr does a brilliant job of showing you the activity that is taking place around your site, from the spark line showing how many people have viewed your photos, to lists of recent activity and people adding tags. It is great at surfacing the social activity around Flickr on the surface of the site, so that, when you enter as a visitor, you have a sense of people being there and doing things. We could be doing much more of that with our sites. Teens have an incredibly strong radar for footprints on people’s sites; seeing what other people have left behind and other people’s activity is critical.

IV. Creating Value

The difficulty is understanding how to turn all of that into value and understanding what value means. We are still learning a lot about this. One of the most important points is that, when

somebody genuinely engages with, becomes immersed in and contributes in your project, the contribution is almost definitely going to happen outside the site. For example, we did a project called *Routes*, which Alice will talk more about later on. One part of it was a comedy gig that had some link to a story within *Routes*. One of the teens wrote about the gig on their blog. Part of understanding the impact that you are having is measuring that outside of the project.

Most of our projects that worked this year – and particularly *Battlefront* – have had a huge effect across many different platforms and media. The campaigns on *Battlefront* do not really live on Battlefront.co.uk, but on Facebook and Flickr. The teens that we have been supporting have been in *The Mirror* and on GMTV, Sky and Radio 4. They have been talking at conferences and doing stunts. They have been doing everything outside in the real world. We need to find ways of enabling teens to talk about things that they are passionate about in whatever channel they want to. We do not expect them to do it all on Battlefront.co.uk. The challenge we have is how we keep track of that and measure it.

V. Measuring Value

In terms of measuring the value that people are deriving from projects, you almost have to assume that that is going to happen outside of your main site and project, given that that is simply the way that teens understand the boundaries of their on- and offline worlds. We have been experimenting with a model for measuring our projects, which will be on 4Producers, so you can look at them later in more detail. I was looking for a way of measuring projects and wanted it to be a tool that would offer a very simple way of understanding these quite complex dynamics. We are not talking about overnights, but we are measuring different types of activity around the project. I also wanted something that we could use during a project to find out whether or not it was working, which is critical for us.

Generally, when we are building a long-term project such as *Battlefront* or *Year Dot*, we want to keep at least half to two-thirds of the budget for the live period. Once the site is up, that is when the project starts; it is not the end of it. We want to be able to make changes to the site, to make nips and tucks to the designs, to add features, to take pictures away, and to experiment with them. We have done it well this year but we can do it even better in the future in terms of being much more iterative and dynamic.

The tool is based on an idea by Dave McClure, who runs the SlideShare site. We measure three types of activity:

- People who visit sites.
- People who become fans and regularly engage with us.
- The hardcore who contribute or distribute content; they may upload something of their own or take our content and put it into their own space.

We measure them according to gaining attention, keeping attention or turning it into value. For each project, we will think about what we can measure to demonstrate that that is happening. These metrics will change on every project, but for a project like *Year Dot* or *Battlefront*, in terms of gaining attention, we see the video all over the web, so we might measure the number of times the video is viewed on iTunes, Dailymotion or YouTube, as well as Yeardot.co.uk.

In terms of keeping their attention, we might look at how many times people view video when they come to Yeardot, because that shows that they have not just watched one video and forgotten about it, but have been interested enough to visit the site and watch more videos.

In terms of turning it to value, we might look at how many people are using social bookmarking tools like Digg or Reddit. In fact, we have found that teens do not use those tools, so we are looking more at ratings on YouTube etc. It is, however, still early days for us.

In terms of fanning, we might look at how many people friend us on social networks. We have about 13,000 friends of *Year Dot* on MySpace and a similar number for *Battlefront* on Bebo, which means that, every time we post a blog, those people are receiving updates and finding out more about the project. We look at the amount of people who sign up to newsletters, which gives us a slightly higher bandwidth way into their attention. In terms of value, we might then look for people commenting on the main hub site.

For the really hardcore, which will be a very small minority of the total audience, there might be people who are entering competition, commenting on the individual teens who are part of the project on their main sites, or, even better, embedding content. On *Battlefront*, we expected with a widget that could be downloaded and embedded into a blog to declare someone's support for a teen, which we could push content to. Even though there has been only small number of embeds, they drive a huge amount of traffic. These are just examples of how we are trying to measure these far more complex interactions that we are having with our audience.

VI. Learnings

We have learned four things from this year:

- We have to go out to our user streams in order to gain their attention; we cannot assume that they will come and find us. Streams also include television. We use adverts during breaks in Channel 4 programmes to attract attention. Television is still a really good way of gaining attention when we can do it. Both *Battlefront* and *Year Dot* see a big spike when we transmit the programmes on the more schedule. With *Routes*, we managed to get some *Three Minute Wonders*, although that did not seem to drive much traffic to the site.
- In terms of distribution, games are phenomenally good at gaining attention. We distributed some games with Miniclip this year, which drew some amazing attention in terms of numbers.
- In terms of showing users' footprints, we need to design projects that reflect what users are doing back to other users and to themselves, so that they feel that they are part of the site and the project.
- Understand what metrics you have set yourselves and what tells you about what is and is not working. Understand how to change that quickly if people are not doing certain things. If parts of the site are not working, you need the money and resources to make quick changes.
- Understand that much of the value lies in people talking about the project in their own spaces.

That was a summary of our learnings, but we can talk about them in greater detail during the question and answer session later on. Alice, what are we looking for now?

VII. What We Want to Commission

Alice Taylor

I am looking at both televisual projects and those in alternative formats. Some projects are still single-platform, but we are looking at cross- or multi-platform ones too, where the teens are, such as in social networks, games, comics, mobile, widgets, applications, virtual worlds and audio. If we are trying to do education, we want to go where the teens are, in the formats that they are familiar with. Sometimes, these are really broad formats; for example, all teenagers play games. There are no teenagers, apart from some very singular people, who do not play games. Elsewhere, there are upcoming trends; for example, comics are popular among teens; virtual worlds are a trend that is slowly but steadily growing and is up from 15% to 30% in a year or so. A new virtual world appears every month for our audience. We keep an eye on what moves.

VIII. Research Activities

We have a number of research activities throughout the year, which you can have access to:

- The biggest one that we have is called UK Tribes, which segments the teen audience into tribes, as described by themselves. It is interesting to dig around in that. For instance, a teenager who considers themselves within the indie spectrum, ranging from hipsters through to crafters and seamsters, makes up just under half of all teenagers in Britain.
- The video that you saw at the beginning is slightly out of date; we have had two live projects since then. You saw *Bow Street Runner*, which has had over a million plays and won a number of awards. Littleloud made that and is making our second game for us, on the subject of civil liberties.
- *Routes* was a game about genetics and DNA. We also wanted to try to make it appealing to girls because, generally, girls do very well at science GCSE before dropping off. We wanted to aim at girls. We made it very televisual, with a mystery/drama documentary, and some mini games. It has been up for four months and we have seen over 15 million plays of the mini games and over half a million visitors to the site. The best news of all is that the majority are teenage and female, which is an awesome success for us.
- *1066* went out last week. It is a historically accurate military strategy game, made by Preloaded. It has been up for a few days and has seen 40,000 plays so far.

With all of these, we commission for about four years. The product goes up and we measure audience and impact for that duration.

IX. 2010 and Beyond

We will be looking for ideas for 2010 and beyond. Ones in development currently include:

- Five games, ranging from easily accessible Flash games through to straight-up PC games for the group who are going for the hardcore male teen-type player who spends their entire time playing games without ever looking at websites.

- One book-sharing widget, which we will embed into social networks like Bebo, MySpace and Facebook.
- One online comic, of which we will distribute a printed version through the library network. The comic is on general life pressures.
- One straight-to-YouTube television series, which features a celebrity. We hope that, while the series is short, with only eight webisodes, featuring someone famous is a quick route to being noticed.
- Potentially one virtual world.

X. Themes for 2010

We covered life choices, politics and science in 2008, and will continue to do so in 2009-10. Certain themes come up every year with teens: sex, drugs, alcohol, relationships, mental and physical health, money and careers. These are perennial themes for teenagers that do not change between the ages of 14 and 19.

We realise that there is a big opportunity in mental health particularly, and I am looking to commission one or two big projects in that area for 2010. This really started when someone pointed out that approximately 37% of UK teens are, at any point, clinically depressed, while only 10% seek any help. We are not talking about peripheral issues; we really want to tackle the mainstream teen mental health problems of depression, cutting, self-esteem, bulimia and anorexia.

The second one is on territories. The idea is that, 10 years ago, teens had a much wider physical area in which they could roam. Over this period, through a combination of paedophilia scares and general crime, that roaming space has reduced substantially, if not literally to the bedroom. However, crime statistics have not really changed, so we now have teens growing up indoors.

Games can often be quite off-putting, as can comics, especially if you have no direct experience. I do want to point out, however, that we are doing cross- or multimedia projects too. *Routes*, for example, contains many things in one space, so audiovisual can happen in games and comics, and comics can happen within animation. I want to be careful that we do not stick to these labels too strictly.

There is a lot of specialised talent out there. Most of our projects have been a partnership between a television indie and a digital indie. In some cases, it is one of the other; in most cases, however, it is a partnership. Most of you are in this room, so do network, because you never know who you will meet.

Finally, there are spaces that we need to be present in. One of the things that we are always looking for insider information on where the next spaces are coming up. While we keep an eye on it, people who come to us with a specialism say, 'We have been looking at Xbox LIVE for a year and we know exactly what is going on there and this is what you should do.' That is fantastic for us. We have very little on Facebook at the moment, quite a bit on MySpace and nothing on Xbox LIVE, PSP, PSN or mobile. There are lots of iPhone pictures but teens do not yet have iPhones, which is a difficulty. The science TV show will go straight to YouTube, but we need more experimental routes. We can tell you what is up and coming, but you can tell us too.

XI. Partnerships

Matt Locke

Partnerships are increasingly important to us going forward. *Routes* was a great partnership with the Wellcome Trust, which put money into the project and was very effective as a co-commissioner. It was not just about the money – although, in the current climate, that is very nice; it was also about its expertise and experience around the issues of science, which really validated the project.

Alice Taylor

It was a DNA and genetics project and it gave us access to the Sanger Institute, where part of the human genome was sequenced, and to some named scientists, who were involved in the project throughout and really got the science in the project absolutely spot-on.

Matt Locke

If you are dealing with particular issues like territories, the Joseph Rowntree Trust did some great work last year around teens mapping their local spaces and talking about where they did and did not feel safe. We are really interested in working with partners like that, who can bring resources in terms of knowledge or finance to a project. We have not done any branded projects this year, but we are talking to some media agencies. Given that we are an education department to provide public value, we are more than happy to explore brand associations with a project. We are very interested in projects that come with really good partners onboard, who are genuine partners, rather than people who just sign a piece of paper.

Questions and Answers

Participant

[Inaudible question off mic]

Alice Taylor

They are hard to get. Xbox LIVE, PlayStation Network and Wii are bound by the corporations that own them, so it is tricky. It is not just an open platform that we can get into, but we are finding that people are beginning to develop relationships with these brands. Some people are talking to Microsoft, for example, and Microsoft has an academic and educational division. Maybe that is the route in. Equally, by developing games, you can just put them up on the Community Channel on Xbox LIVE or WiiWare. There are ways in but we are exploring them.

Participant

What about something like Steam? It just seems like an easier entry point than the others.

Alice Taylor

I am expecting one or two of the games under development in the portfolio to go on to Steam.

Matt Locke

We should also mention iTunes, which has been surprisingly successful for us. We have put quite a lot of video from projects like *Year Dot*, *Battlefront* and *Slabovia* onto iTunes. We have had about 60,000 or 70,000 subscribers to *Year Dot*. What is great about that is, if someone subscribes to a regular video podcast, the content is synched to their device every time they synch their phone. We did not really plan for that; we did it just because Channel 4 had a presence on iTunes and it was relatively easy to do. It has been interestingly successful and we are talking to Apple to think about iTunes as a distribution channel for video.

Participant

You mentioned mobile games and the fact that you have not found any –

Alice Taylor

Mobile products – it does not necessarily have to be a game.

Participant

Could you elaborate on what you are looking for?

Alice Taylor

Again, it is about getting past the barrier – the barrier being the operator. As the phones become more like mobile internet devices and you no longer have to go through the operator, it becomes much easier, but smartphones are not really distributed among teens yet. It is not the end of the world that we do not have a mobile project, but I am expecting them to come in. The idea is that it is the same kind of thing that we do on the web, except it comes to that very personal device.

Matt Locke

We have had some great developments in the mobile space in the last year or so, but the cost of reaching teens, when they are not really using smartphones that can access the web on the phone, and are locked into very fragmented network platforms such as SMS, MMS or java downloads, is really high. In a way, then, we are waiting until everyone uses a mobile browser for it to become much more interesting. We think that that might happen in 2010 or 2011 if the iPhone goes onto different networks and there is massive price competition. We will be interested in talking about ideas then but, until now, it has been too expensive for us to achieve the scale that we want with these projects on mobile.

Participant

You showed a slide on the book-sharing application and the comic. They are projects that you have in development now, but do you want any more?

Alice Taylor

They are just things in development. They are examples of things that we are willing to develop. Most of it is or will end up as a commission. We are absolutely open for more. I was looking at the alternative platforms and wondering whether to list things in order of importance. The short answer is, 'How many people are using it?' Everyone uses games; most people not everyone uses comics and mobile. We want to take the right punt in the right place. For instance, the hardcore teen gamer is very hard to reach using other things, so we go in with quite a small project, and then we do something else with another group.

Participant

What other non-Channel 4 projects – educational or otherwise – would be good to look at for inspiration?

Matt Locke

Anything that Jane McGonigal does, because she is awesome.

Alice Taylor

MTV has been doing some really interesting things recently, but I just do not think that anyone is taking any notice of it.

Matt Locke

I really like MTV's Cherry Girl, which came out of MTV Switch. It is their CSR-type activity. It has done a lot of things before around rock stars and celebrities talking about climate change, but they have tried to create something different with Cherry Girl. Be careful about Googling for Cherry Girl – that is all I will say. MTV Cherry Girl is a fictional character designed with Ridley Scott. They have made a beautiful, vaguely anime/manga film starring a character called Cherry Girl, and put it in the video schedules. They have also created a blog in which Cherry Girl blogs little missions. Interestingly, it is starting from the point of view of a very clear voice.

What you must understand about teens is that they are spending all their time online talking to their friends, so the voice and the way and which a project speaks is really critical. With *Battlefront* and *Year Dot*, we are trying to bring up the authentic voices of the teens in the mix. People follow Alex Rose and his campaign because he has an authentic voice. We are really interested in projects that play with the idea of creating a voice for a particular issue or idea, and that voice exists on lots of different sites. For example, Kate Quilton, who works at Channel 4, is doing the *Big Brother* stuff this year – she is brilliant at it. She is really good on YouTube and Bebo. In those social spaces, it is really hard to be Channel 4; you have to be Kate Quilton or Alex Rose.

With a lot of these projects, then, I am not really interested in how we do a big, branded Channel 4 project, but in the right voices to talk about territories – the idea of how teens navigate the public space around them. Territory is not necessarily about gangs, but about the way teens present themselves in public space, the idea about government campaigns on the creation of youth centres, while issues for teens are around travelling from where they live to the youth centre, given that the streets are problematic spaces. There is the question of commuting rural areas and the way in which

which you deal with public space there. It is a really big issue.

I am interested in what the right voice is to start that conversation with teens, because they really respond to a voice. MTV is doing something interesting with Cherry Girl and the way that she uses forms of dialogue like Twitter and blogs. There is a brilliant presentation called Copy as Interface, written by Erika Hall, in which she argues that we navigate the web in words rather than images. The language used is a very vernacular, oral language, and the best Web 2.0 sites, such as Flickr, use a very informal language. Cherry Girl is a really interesting approach to that, and many of Jane McGonigal's projects are very strong in terms of their voice too. I have written up some notes on some of the commissioning for attention issues on my blog, which is test.org.uk. It includes links to a lot of presentations, including those by Henry Jenkins, Erika Hall and others.

Alice Taylor

I would like to an educational Doctor Horrible Sing-Along Blog. What Joss Whedon did was amazing, even though it is simple.

Matt Locke

I loved *The Guild* as well.

Alice Taylor

The Guild was awesome. Felicia Day was one of the actors in *Buffy*. She is an aspiring writer who wrote her own *World of Warcraft*-centric online soap, which ended up being huge on YouTube, before migrating to Xbox LIVE and is now Microsoft's shining jewel of TV. Microsoft has just announced at E3 that the Xbox is now a live TV streaming platform and can receive both Facebook and Twitter, so Microsoft is beginning to take over.

Participant

Do you have a guide budget per project or per minute of video?

Alice Taylor

It depends on the project. Mental health had a budget of £1 million to cover what we consider to be two quite large projects, one huge project, or lots of little ones. *Bow Street Runner* had a budget of £150,000; that for *Routes* was four times that. The television cost inflated the overall cost. It depends what it is in.

Matt Locke

We made a lot of television last year, because Ofcom still wanted us to keep to some kind of originated hours in the morning schedule. Many of the projects that we did in the first year, then, were very expensive. We made 20 half hours and an hour around *Year Dot*, and two series of five half hours around *Battlefront*. We kept crews live for a year following the teens. It is a lot of money. We would be happy to do that again, but it would need to make sense for the project. We are looking for projects that can work in eight weeks or over eight months. It is difficult to say what an overall cost is.

Alice Taylor

The annual budget is still £4.5-5 million, so you can still work within the same picture as it always was.

Participant

Could you talk about branding integration in relation to Channel 4 and a young audience in terms of the dos and don'ts?

Matt Locke

In terms of the Channel 4 brand or working with other Channel 4 brands?

Participant

In terms of working with brands outside of Channel 4, so funding/sponsorship.

Matt Locke

It is on a case-by-case basis. There are due prominence issues outlined within the producer's handbook, which you can look at. Our Compliance team's advice is always that it is so contextual. It is just like it is for television: you can have someone supporting a project but, in the film, if everyone is wearing Nike trainers or drinking Coke in every scene, that is a big problem. Key is thinking about who the partner is and what they want out of the project, and thinking about the context. The Channel 4 branding itself changes, depending on the context, so *Battlefront* on the television is strongly branded as Channel 4.

The website is branded as Channel 4 to a much lesser extent, because it is in their spaces. On Bebo, there is hardly any branding for Channel 4 whatsoever. The branding really depends on context. It should be a conversation that we have. It should not be 'we cannot do this with Nokia' or 'with Orange'; if someone is interested, we should have a conversation, so do not rule anything out. Be aware, however, that there are some boundaries, depending on the context and the kind of content that we are making etc.

Participant

In terms of what you have learned online over the last year or two, is there anything that has not really worked for you and that you would not consider again?

Matt Locke

We have done a lot of expensive seeding, and I increasingly want to look at what we do with that. Sometimes, that seeding on lots of different websites has worked; sometimes, it has not. Using games for seeding, we kicked off *Slabovia* with an online game and achieved huge numbers. However, because we did not have any more games on the site, everyone went straightaway. Being aware of how and where you are seeding, and what promise you are setting up, is crucial. *Slabovia* then got it right with a newsletter and with SlabSpace, which work brilliantly, but the first

experiment taught us a lot about what games and seeds and the relationship between those projects really are.

How you gain attention and encourage people to visit the site needs to be thought about very carefully. If you go out with a big competition that has nothing to do with the project and does not easily segue into people really becoming part of the project, it makes the handover between gaining attention and keeping it very difficult. It is about finding ways for people to come across a project and naturally feeling like they are part of it, leaving their footprint there and establishing regular contact points. All of that is still very difficult.

Alice Taylor

We have about 30 seconds as that teen cruises through.

Matt Locke

30 seconds is a lot.

Alice Taylor

In those 30 seconds, if they cannot do something, they are gone, so they need to be able to vote, collect, play, have a say, join in or do something.

Matt Locke

The biggest piece of learning is: keep in simple.

Janey Walker

[Inaudible off mic] over-complexity in that first 15 seconds is a problem, so it is about the simplicity of knowing where you are, what it is and what you can do within the first 15 seconds.

Matt Locke

We did a lot of long-term qualitative work with groups of teens using an agency called Dubit. We had longitudinal studies about a number of these projects and, by far, the questions were ‘what is it?’ and ‘what do I do?’ They are the two things that they want to know straightaway, and you cannot be clear enough. Every time we tried to do something that we thought we were being cool and edgy with, the reaction was, ‘What the f-ck is this about?’ The copywriting on *Battlefront* is excellent. You know what you are doing. On *Year Dot*, it took us a longer time to understand how to pitch the project to teens. We had to work much harder on trying to kick off the engagement and participation, partly because the issues were very different and it is hard to have people participate in very personal issues, whereas *Battlefront* is a bit more ‘out there’. Be absolutely Ronseal about it: make the site do exactly what it says on the tin. If they do not understand it within 15 seconds, they will go and do something else.

Participant

Do you use colleges and schools to help promote your projects? How do you interact with them?

Matt Locke

We do not really promote them through schools, but we encourage indies to test projects. We do not want to focus-group ideas to death, but putting an idea in front of a group of 14-year-olds in a classroom or youth club is invaluable. None of us here are aged 14 to 19, so we do not know. We are not going to suggest that we can look at a project and say, 'Yeah, that's down with the kids'; we do not really understand. Using teens and listening to their opinion, then, is really important.

Alice Taylor

The *Routes* project seeded using three schools. It nurtured a few children and asked them whether they wanted to be the champion for the project. It worked.

Participant

Are you not letting teachers know that these projects are out there?

Matt Locke

Increasingly, we are, but there are two issues around that: first, we do not want to design them to look like they are for teachers, because that switches teens off. Second, it is down to resources. We are not the BBC and we do not have a 200-strong education team, half of whom are constantly at conferences like Becta and BETT. We have stopped talking at BETT because we were always so on-the-fringe that something like only three people turned up. It was quite disheartening. The team is me and Alice, so we just do not have the time to build the networks. We are trying to do something about this and we have a big research project at the moment looking at where teachers go online for resources. It is just difficult to find the time to build relationships.

Participant

You clearly have a healthy and in-touch attitude towards operating outside Channel 4's walls and within teens' spaces. How much control are you willing to relinquish in order to allow people to own Channel 4, to make it theirs and to propagate messages in ways that suit them? What is your general attitude and have you had good and bad experiences of that?

Matt Locke

The experience around *Battlefront* was good. That is the 'back office' for those teens campaigns, which are happening all over the place. The *Battlefront* team has worked a lot with the teens. If teens are part of a project, you have to do a lot of work simply to have them do anything. They are lazy. The team has supported them brilliantly and those projects have gone all over the web. Holly Shaw's campaign was about Donor Day, which is about trying to have people sign up to the donor register. The *Metro* masthead changed to her logo for the day. Channel 4 was nowhere in that. If we were lucky, other media properties might mention *Battlefront* as a name, but it would never say 'Channel 4's *Battlefront*'. They do not want to give us free publicity. To be honest, I do not mind that, as long as the overall project and the people are gaining recognition. People will find their routes in and they will come across a Channel 4 brand at some point, and realise that it is Channel 4.

Participant

On those occasions when the Channel 4 brand is in the conversations that are happening outside, do you have any particular attitude or strategy towards how close you want the brand to be to the conversations that are out of control? If you were going to use a piece of shareable media that is Channel 4-branded but you allowed people to appropriate and propagate, would you be nervous about being that closely associated with what people could abuse?

Alice Taylor

Sneeze is one of the mini games in *Routes*, which we originally put on MiniClip for a month during the live run of *Routes*. About a month ago, MiniClip rebranded it The Swine Flu Game, without telling us, and put a piece of text underneath it that was not educationally accurate. It said something like ‘stop flu by sneezing into a hanky’. That was bad, because the educational message was temporarily broken. In terms of the product being out there, however, we are completely all for that.

Matt Locke

Channel 4’s approach to social networks is that we do not moderate people using Channel 4-branded spaces on YouTube. When we send anyone from a Channel 4 site to a Channel 4 presence on YouTube, MySpace or Bebo, we give guidance that says that the user is now entering a social space that Channel 4 is not in control of, that they will see things that might be offensive, and that others will read what they write. We advise them to address any complaints to the platform-owner, rather than to Channel 4. Particularly with younger audiences, we are quite careful about where conversations happen and we watch those spaces all the time. The voices element is really important. If you have somebody on a project who can be a voice of reason within that community, that is a much better way of dealing with it than just saying ‘we are not doing that at all’ and switching something off.

When we first did *Year Dot*, before the project launch, we had a seeding competition, whereby we asked people about their year dot. We asked everyone to comment on MySpace and some people started being a daft, saying things like ‘When my granddad died, I got a bit gloomy’, and then people started talking about their lives. Then someone posted something saying, ‘You are just a bunch of navel-gazing w-nkers’ and it was all quite offensive. We thought about what we should do and decided to leave it there. About two days later, the same person asked to have his comment off, adding, ‘I have just read everyone else’s and I realise I am being a bit of a dick.’ Sunlight is a great disinfectant.

Another example is Holly Shaw, who has had an almighty conversation on her *Battlefront* blog about the ethics and issue around donor campaigning. Someone started posting that you should not give donor organs to fat people, who are only going to become ill again and will need another in a few years’ time. People were accusing her of being too optimistic about the success rate of organ donors. We were watching it and being aware that Holly was being attacked. Other people were coming to her defence and a debate was had, which is what the project was about.

We watch those spaces and, occasionally, the *Battlefront* team will go in and say, ‘This is where to push the conversation’, but we are not saying, ‘Let us not go near that space’. Having a healthy debate is a good sign on a project. We do not want to expose the teens taking part to any kind of

risks that they would not be part of anyway, but we also do not want to pretend that the web is a sterile place where everyone plays nicely.

Alice Taylor

As soon as you start to meddle, you break up the party.

Participant

That is an interesting case in point, because the best way to manage those processes is to have young people as part of the project managing those spaces themselves. That raises a question for me about where any line is drawn between the process that achieves your objectives for this round of commissioning and the idea of commissioning a product. We run a project which involves managing and training teams of young people; therefore, resourcing projects is more than the production of the online or TV product. When coming to Channel 4, although it will mean mixing the funding for the project, where does Channel 4 draw the line in a huge project that involves training, managing and supporting groups of young people in running that project?

Matt Locke

Production in this environment is such a more dynamic thing than just researching an idea, casting, shooting and editing it, and sticking it up there. It is an ongoing process whereby you are part of a community. *Battlefront* is a community of teens and people who are following those stories and the film crews making it. The teams behind the projects that we have been doing this year have done an amazing job this year, given that they are learning on the job about how to manage these projects. There is a real community going.

The kind of community management where you are really doing workshops for people is interesting, but I question whether that scales to the kind of audience that we are trying to reach. You can use those types of projects to kick-start a community, but we are really interested in scaling communities very quickly. Sometimes, it is hard to go from a facilitated group of tens or hundreds of teens to a group of 10,000 or 100,000 teens taking part in an online project.

Participant

What does five million sound like?

Matt Locke

If you are facilitating five million teens –

Participant

[Inaudible off mic]

Matt Locke

As long as we are not paying for someone to work with all five million of them, that is probably all right. I would like to solve that, because we know we have to do a lot of work with teens. With

Battlefront and *Year Dot* in particular, I am thinking about them now as having three levels. There is a storytelling level, where we follow a small group of teens and tell their stories. We give them a lot of support and attention. We put their films out as quickly as we can on TV and online. Then there is a platform level, where we try to engage people in a community and have them talk about the issues and the content. There is then a republishing level, where we try to have teens publish their own thoughts in other contexts and spaces.

I am interested in how those three approaches interplay with each other. *Battlefront* and *Year Dot* this year were really big on storytelling, not bad in terms of platforming, but not very active in terms of republishing. Next year, for *Battlefront*, we want to open up the platform so that anyone can host a campaign. I want to deal with people like MOO.com and others, so that teens can publish their own campaign material if they are running campaigns. I want to grow those two sides of the project. However, what is important is that interplay between storytelling, where you are taking a more linear approach to telling individual teen stories, which drives reach, developing a good platform that will drive engagement and community, and designing good publishing tools that will let teens participate. That is the Holy Grail in many of these projects.

Alice Taylor

If there is a large cost involved in managing a group or building something, we often find that this is where Government steps in. There is plenty of funding available. If it is about technology or public services, it is worth looking at 4iP.

Matt Locke

We are quite happy to work with 4iP if there is a real platform there, which the project supports or kicks off.

Alice Taylor

Yes, if there is an infrastructural cost in the project.

Closing Comments

Alice Taylor

We have run out of time. The transcript will be available on the 4Producers website.

Matt Locke

We will also create a better 4Education blog, which we have been meaning to do for years. We both blog ourselves, but we would much rather keep a continual list of stuff that interests us out there, so it will be up somewhere on Channel4.com soon. Thank you all for coming.

**This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquis
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