

Channel 4
Channel 4 Education Briefing
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**Education Briefing: Using New Media To Engage Teenage
Audiences**

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I. Preamble

Janey Walker, Head of Education

I am Janey Walker and I am Head of Education at Channel 4. Thank you very much for coming. I think I should also introduce you. Matt Locke is present. He is our new Commissioning Editor for Education and New Media. Deborah Ward is also joining us. Some of you will know her; she is our Commissioning Editor for Education. Becky Macklin, who all of you will have dealt with on various occasions, is also present. She is our Administrator for Education and is very effective. Later, Adam Gee will provide additional input. He is Commissioning Editor for Factual and Interactive Programming. He will be joining us shortly.

II. General Update of Channel 4 Activities

1. Activities of New Head

I thought I would start off by providing a general update about Channel 4. As you know, the channel has experienced a hectic period in the last few weeks. A large amount of airtime has been devoted to Channel 4 events. Within the channel, we feel that we are in a better condition than we have been for several months. Julian Bellamy, our new Head, is now firmly established and is focusing on our 2008 schedule. He will be talking within the month about various editorial changes that we are considering. It is definitely a very positive development for a lot of the factual commissioning departments.

2. Education Awards

We are here today to discuss education. I planned to start by expressing my extreme gratitude to our suppliers from the past year. We had a very respectable number of nominations in key categories at the Royal Television Society (RTS) Education Awards last week. Some of you were present, but others of you may not know. I want to congratulate everybody who was nominated, particularly Two Four and Maroon. They were winners of their two respective categories.

III. Ways to Reach Teenage Audience

1. Research Carried Out

As most of you probably know, we are in the process of implementing a radical change in the programming that Channel 4 will offer to 14 to 19-year-olds. We carried out a lot of research last year. It showed that neither young people nor schools were very aware, or using to any great extent, the programmes that we broadcast in the mornings. That is extremely frustrating for those working on educational programming, because the quality of the programmes and the range of the subjects the programmes cover is impressive. We feel it is quite incumbent on us to improve the access to our activities. To a large extent, we have been reconsidering the best ways to use our £6 million annual budget for this market.

2. Conclusions From Research

Our conclusion is that we should concentrate on reaching this audience in new ways. Primarily, this will mean online projects which deal with education in a new way. We are very anxious not to duplicate the BBC's activities. We are anxious not to duplicate the activities of any commercial properties. We will concentrate on informal education. We have taken a lot of discussions about the areas we should concentrate on.

3. Areas For Programming

In summary, there are four main areas. The first involves the skills required to progress in life. They are the types of skills which are not necessarily learnt in school, but which are a very important factor in how one progresses later in life. The second area is entrepreneurship. The third area is media and digital literacy. We refer to the fourth area as TV Plus. That means online projects which relate to some of Channel 4's peak-time education programmes. These are not necessarily a direct follow-through from that, but they are related in certain ways to the projects broadcast at peak time.

4. Structure of Online Programming

I think that almost all our online commissions will include TV programmes as part of the project. However, the primary task at present is to identify and develop the online programmes for 2008 and 2009. We will still have a TV schedule in the mornings. To be honest, on examining it, there is not a noticeable difference from the situation in the last few years. The schedule will still contain programmes commissioned by the educational department. It will still broadcast repeats from educational peak-time programmes. There will simply be a slightly higher rate of repeats.

5. TV Programmes Still Useful Tool

However, that is still a very important part of our activities. It is a very good showcase for our activities. It is still a way to reach people. Therefore, we are not saying it is not important, or that we will not be carrying out much activity. We are simply saying that when we are carrying out a major change, as we are at present, the first step is to identify the new projects that we will commit to. The introduction is complete. I will introduce Matt first and then Deborah. They will provide more detail. We will conduct a Question and Answer session afterwards. Please feel free to ask us as many questions as you can. If there is anything we can answer, or that you think we should know about, we will be very happy to receive feedback.

Matt Locke, Commissioning Editor, Education and New Media

IV. Outlining Definitions

Thank you very much, Janey. As Janey said, we are essentially trying to reach the audience of 14-19-year-olds in a new way. However, I first of all want to emphasise an area which, to me, still strongly deals with identifying stories or issues which are of relevance to this audience. I will talk briefly about some research we have carried out into this audience. I will then briefly discuss our definition of 'cross-platform commissioning.' That phrase and the phrase '360' are being used a great deal. I simply want to discuss our personal definition, so that you will be aware of what we are discussing. I do not want you to be concerned about the need to pitch impressive technological projects to us. We are interested in excellent stories and issues. In the area of development, we want to consider the treatment and cooperate with you about that. I want to say that directly.

V. Themes Identified in Teen Audit

1. Sense of Rejection From Mainstream Forms of Communication

First of all, Channel 4 Research has carried out a teen audit, which will be made available on the 4Producers' Web site. I have selected the five themes from the conclusion of that to provide you with an idea about our understanding of our audience. One of the biggest themes from this teen audit was the idea of rejected youth. Although teenagers are very interested in mainstream issues, there is actually a disrespect for the establishment, disengagement from traditional institutions which provide them with access to these issues. As a result, children are being unintentionally excluded. This is not a new discovery. The presentation explores this in a little more detail.

2. Regulation of Teenagers' Environments

I think we are witnessing increasing regulation of the environment of teenagers, particularly the physical environments. As a result, that leads to a sense that they are constantly being monitored, constantly limited in their ability to express themselves and their identity in the way that they live their lives. That leads to the sentiment that although they care about mainstream issues, they are rejected from that debate.

3. Disparity of Ages Within Group

As always, the 14-19 age group is a large age group. There is a major difference between 14-year-olds and 19-year-olds. I will say directly than when we consider reaching this audience, I do think

we need to be quite specific sometimes with some themes about our pitching area within that age-group. This is because the types of styles, the kinds of approaches and the kinds of voices used might be very different.

4. Moving Away From Families

This is the age when a person starts to consider life beyond their families. A teenager's social network and family might still be very important to them, but they may occasionally be in opposition or in conflict. This is partly because children's time outside the home is being increasingly regulated and patrolled. This audience is spending an increasing amount of time online and developing friendships online. We are witnessing a decreasing role for fathers in this group, partly because of their absence from many family networks. However, this age group is starting to think about their role beyond the family group and are more concerned about peers than parents.

5. Importance of Online Communication

a. Equally as important as face time

Media and technology is a very positive area, but there have been some interesting changes in this area. Again, partly through the regulation of their ability to come together in real time, children are increasingly communicating through technology and that is threatening physical communication. In the more detailed research, there was a question about preferred methods of staying in contact with friends. Face-to-face communication and Instant Messaging (IM) scored equally. They scored higher than a lot of the other types of communication, such as email etc. It was the first time we had seen in the statistics that children were expressing a preference for communicating with their friends through technology, rather than face to face communication. One method is not replacing the other, but children are increasingly negotiating these relationships online.

b. Driven by mobile phone

This area is driven to a great extent by the mobile phone, which is an almost talismanic device for this audience. It has huge social-networking memberships. However, we have yet to see what this will mean in the coming five years regarding the ways in which people form and maintain relationships at different stages in their lives. That is actually a very interesting issue for us. How will these networks gain new meanings as teenagers progress and move through their lives?

VI. Differences and Similarities Between Social Classes

1. Similarities on Education and Drugs

There are surprising similarities, but also large gaps between the privileged and the less privileged in this audience. Surprisingly, ABC and DE teenagers have very similar attitudes towards drugs and education. These attitudes are surprisingly conservative. The research we have been carrying out demonstrates that, if anything, attitudes towards drugs and towards progressing to higher education are becoming more conservative. More people are expecting to access higher education, despite issues such as loans etc. Children are moving away from hard drugs and in some cases, soft drugs. Different perspectives can be derived from different research, but that trend does exist.

2. Split on Sex and Violence

There is a larger split in the behaviours of the various social classes with regard to sex, smoking and fighting. This relates more to actual behaviour than attitudes. DEs are still more likely to be involved, or to have been involved in violence. They are far more likely to smoke and far more likely to be having unprotected sex etc. There is a mixture among the social classes.

3. Racism vs Immigration

There are a few interesting schisms with regard to multiculturalism and immigration. Throughout almost all social classes and age groups, racism is deemed unacceptable. However, we are witnessing a strong anti-immigration sentiment, particular with regard to some of the reports publicised in the newspapers which dealt with boundary regions in the UK. In the last few years, these areas have witnessed a lot of immigration from accession countries etc. In a lot of these discussions, the fear of terrorism is present in the background.

VII. Definition of Cross-Platform Commissioning for Audience

1. Not Involving Specific Technology Platforms

I would like to discuss briefly the definition of ‘cross-commissioning platforms’ for this audience. I would like to emphasise that for me, this does not relate to specific technology platforms. We receive a few scenarios in which there is clearly a strong idea for television, along with elements of mobile phones, the internet and other different platforms.

2. Audience Accustomed to Web

The Web is 16 years old this year. I am referring to the Web, rather than the Internet, which is much older. This group of 14-19-year-olds is the first cohort to have grown up with the Web as a constant presence in the background. There is a saying that, ‘technology is everything that was invented after you were born.’ These children do not necessarily see these platforms and spaces as technology. The platforms are far more important for the social dynamics that the various networks provide them with. It relates to the types of conversations and the types of relationships they have in these spaces. This is my attempt to provide a definition of cross-platform projects.

VIII. Social Spaces Teenagers Use on Web

1. Secret Spaces

I would like to discuss various types of social spaces. Some technologies are enabling children to have conversations, discuss issues and talk to friends in different networks. First of all, the most intimate spaces are secret spaces, spaces in which children share issues which are very intimate and personal to them. They often do this with a well-defined community, a set of friends. These conversations are almost always one-to-one, using SMS or IM etc. The types of conversations they have, the way they speak, the way they present themselves, assumes that they are in a secret conversation with friends.

2. Group Spaces

The next spaces are group spaces, which often include a public aspect. They are mentally thought of as spaces that encompass a social network, a group of friends. Even if the teenager does not necessarily know them very well, the tone of voice used and the information shared in this group resemble those used with a group of friends. Sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Tagged, etc are social networking sites in which the atmosphere and the tone of conversation are associated with a group of friends.

3. Spaces For Self-Publicisation

There is another type of social space being facilitated online, which deals less with talking to friends and more with publishing oneself to a slightly more anonymous audience. Spaces such as Flickr and blogging networks are tools which enable children to rehearse using their voices. Teenagers are rehearsing using their voice and experimenting with their identities to an audience which is wider than a circle of friends. It is about publishing, it is about discovering one's identity and the nature of one's voice.

4. Performance Spaces

Then there are spaces which are concerned with performance in which users are actually live in an environment with a community of other people. These are places like Second Life, online role-playing games such as World of Warcraft etc. There is also Sony's Home, which is appearing on PlayStation 3. Often, this is a chance for teenagers to live a richer life and to exaggerate aspects of their identities. They can become the most extreme versions of themselves and be live in an environment, performing with people who they might know and also people they might be meeting in these environments.

5. Varieties of Participation Spaces

Another type of social dynamic relates to participation spaces which I have described as marches, meetings, markets and events. These are events which are often offline as well as online and in which you are collaborating with a group of people to ensure action is taken. There is the experience of being on a march such as the Live 8 marches, anti-war marches etc. There is also the experience of attending meetings and cooperating on a collaborative project with others. There are even markets. There are a lot of interesting ways in which people can participate in economic activities as a very low level. There are sites such as Threadless, in which you can design T-shirts that can then be bought and voted on by communities. New and interesting dynamics of participation are appearing online in these spaces.

6. Watching Spaces

Finally, there are watching spaces. These are spaces in which teenagers might be part of a social network, but the primary experience is of passively watching something with people. However, that experience often then leads to further social activity. Teenagers might watch television, then discuss it through IM. They may also attend a gig and share pictures on Flickr afterwards. These are activities which are still sociable, even though the experience is about watching.

IX. Nature of Cross-Platform Projects

1. Adapting Project to Technical Platform

When I think about cross platform projects, I am really interested in opinions that can be expressed in these spaces regarding issues. If we are designing a project, I am less interested in what it means on a technical platform and am more interested in the ways of discussing this with the audience. How are they talking about these issues already? Are they having conversations in some of these spaces about the issues we want to address? What happens when conversations move between spaces?

2. Implications of Increased Visibility in Communications

One of the most fascinating but also threatening dynamics of some of these digital networks is that an issue previously thought secret can suddenly become public. Conversations and stories can be transferred between these types of services extremely easily. That has been a hugely powerful opportunity, but also potentially quite a threatening situation as well. I am interested in projects which explore these spaces and carry out these different types of conversations, some of which we can be in control of and set the agenda for. There are others in which we will have to carry out the conversation at the same level, or even allow the audience to dominate the conversation and control that conversation themselves.

3. No Definite Blueprint

We do not have a blueprint for the shape of these projects. I think this is true cross-platform commissioning in which we are contemplating storytelling in a very different way. In the next year, there will be a lot of emphasis on experimenting with projects, exploring these spaces and finding people, stories and issues. Then we will be exploring ways of designing projects that are effective in these types of spaces.

X. Web Sites Which Create Opportunities for Communication

1. Sites Containing Social Spaces

I have included a number of items. We will be posting these on the4Producers' site in the coming week. However, there are some sites that I think contain very interesting elements of these social spaces. These include sites such as Twitter and technologies such as Bluetooth. A lot of teenagers share content through Bluetooth, which requires physical proximity to another person. This is because it is free, whereas sending the same content using the mobile-phone network would be very expensive. There are sites such as Flector and Weemie, which are little tours that allow users to create slides or advertise for their social-networking sites. Users can create an animation of their weekends of socialising and post them on their Facebook, MySpace and Bebo pages.

2. Comedy Sites

There are spaces such as WORLD WITHOUT OIL, Beta and sites dealing with the Lollcat phenomenon. These are tiny elements of publishing or collaborative narrative in which people are writing and sharing material as part of a community. Beta and Lollcat are comedy sites. Lollcat is not a site as such. It is a bizarre trend which has appeared on the Web during the last six months,

of people taking pictures of cats and adding bizarre, esoteric comments to them. It is a major site and quite funny, if that is of interest to you. I am interested in how people carry out drama and comedy as a widely distributed collaborative narrative, rather than as actions that are actively driven. Habbo Hotel is another online site that I think originated from Scandinavia.

3. MOO.com

www.moo.com is very interesting. www.moo.com produce printed material, business cards and note cards. They availed of a trend with vast potential. When users visit www.moo.com, they insert their Flickr photograph profiles, or include snapshots of themselves in these virtual worlds such as Habbo Hotel. They are then printed out as business cards, which can then be traded to friends. Teenagers find it very compelling to use physical objects which relate to these virtual worlds which can be traded and swapped, such as badges, stickers etc. MOO has very intelligently availed of the major trend for user-generated content and created a business model as well as that. I think that is very compelling.

4. Entrepreneurial Sites

Threadless is the site I mentioned earlier in which people submit designs for T-shirts and the communities vote on which T-shirts are produced and bought. Epcy is a smaller version of eBay for people who produce craft goods. It originated from Brooklyn and caters for people who produce small amounts of designer goods such as handbags, badges, clothes etc and then trade them with each other. These methods work for User British Projects which relate to procuring more effective information on the activities of MPs. Tonally, it is not right for the audience, but I think their activities relating to accessing political information at an everyday level is very interesting.

5. Lonelygirl

With regard to watching major events or experience, Lonelygirl was a story which began on YouTube. Two writers wrote the story about the character called Lonelygirl. However, rather than announcing it as a major narrative project, they simply broadcast the videos on YouTube as if it were a typical YouTube contributor. When people realised it was written by two male writers, rather than a 16-year-old girl, opinion was evenly divided. Half of the audience felt it was a terrible trick the other half thought it was a good idea. They thought it was an interesting story with an interesting character. It has become quite a phenomenon.

6. Improv Everywhere

Improv Everywhere is an example of how to watch narratives in an interesting way. It concerns a person in the United States who carries out major stunts and events in New York. These often involve large communities. He now has a pilot programme with National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). He creates some extraordinary moments of theatre in the city in which audiences can either physically attend or watch online after they happen. It completes the definition of theatre for this audience. This is an inexhaustible list. I want to provide you with an idea of some of these new spaces and the shape of some of the projects within them. It is now Deborah's turn.

XI. Retrospective View of Educational Programming

Deborah Ward

It is now time for the more retrospective section of the presentation. For those of you who wish to be nostalgic about the earlier days of television, there will be a slight change of tone. We will view the tape and talk a little about our preferences.

XII. Relevance of Television to Teenage Audience

1. Audience Does Not Change

I think the reason for showing the tape is that it demonstrates the original purpose of the brief. I have been working with Matt in the past few months; we are carrying out a change in personnel. The old world of television is disappearing and Matt is moving forward with a new medium. However, regardless of research, the audience is the same as any audience that one works with. You know the essence of human nature and human nature is still the same. It still relates to finding stories and characters. It is possible to include all the language of television with the language that Matt was using earlier.

2. Participation Devices Still Similar

If there is a participation device on the Internet, it is the equivalent of a phone-in as a participation device on the television. The language exists. If producers are accustomed to discussing the journey of their characters and the narrative arcs of the story, that language can still be applied to the pictures submitted to Channel 4 Education. It is still Channel 4.

3. Reason for Channel 4's Success With Teenagers

The reason Channel 4 performs well with the teenage audience is that we are perceived to be dangerous and edgy. We still cover subjects in a tangential way that does not appear obvious. Channel 4 has successfully achieved a particular tone for teenagers. Until a child is 12 or 13, they are within the remit of the BBC and are told how the world should be. Then there is a transition. This audience stops watching the BBC and starts watching Channel 4 because it informs them of the realities of the world. The whole of life is displayed to them. It seems that teenagers are being offered alternatives and access to information that they previously did not have.

4. Continued Opportunities for Innovation in Television

That tone has not disappeared. I feel very passionately that television companies working with digital partners can create groundbreaking material. I feel the need to sell this to people and encourage excitement. It relates to the fusion of people who carry out work. When programme-makers produce television, they try to find the best writers and the people who carry out the best casting. Programme-makers know who these people are and need to find a digital partner that best understands the ways to construct Web sites that entice people. These Websites generate more action. A fusion of these skills will generate some of the excellent content that will be broadcast in 2008 and 2009.

5. TV Remains at Core of Education Remit

That has been my core message in shared briefings with Matt and this process will carry on for at least another few months. We still feel that everybody can find a common language for this material. The language of television is extremely impenetrable. It will not take producers long to learn this information and adjust to the world of new media. Further to that, Matt will provide a little more information about the specifics of how to send in ideas to us.

XIII. Nature of New-Media Pitches

1. Commissions and Budgets

Matt Locke

What do we actually want to do next year? We still have a guaranteed budget of £6 million per year. For that, we want to commission approximately 6-8 projects. This is a lot less than we would usually commission, if we were commissioning a large amount of television. Some of those projects will be quite major projects and will involve some risk, if we hope to interact with this audience in a very different way. We will be commissioning a few other projects with a budget of approximately \$250,000-500,000.

2. Projects Aiming to Empower Audiences

We are seeing to provide an audience with an educational experience which is transformative, rather than simply teaching them. There is an advantage of using a lot of these technologies that are based more on conversations than broadcasting. It allows programme makers to provide the audience with a feeling of empowerment or transformation in the project.

3. Linear Structure

In pitches, we are seeking projects with a very clear linear structure. Very often with online projects, there is an assumption that a site is launched, people visit it and the project maintains a constant level. I am seeking projects which understand the ways in which people hear about issues before they happen and how they will register an interest. The projects will also show an understanding of how these people share their interests and experiences with others and how they will become enthusiastic or motivated to participate in a project.

XIV. Creating Projects Which Engage Audience

1. Factors Triggering Participation

During the project itself, what is that moment of participation? What is that moment of empowerment? What is that moment of community that the project creates, empowers or provides a platform for? What will people do? Who will they meet? Who will they talk to? What do they need to know? We have been discussing ideas with a few people. Very often, the purpose is to pinpoint the needs of this audience. What information can they not obtain? What conversations are difficult for them? What do they need to know to progress in life? That is the type of experience we want to enable this audience to have?

2. Applying Information To Own Lives

Afterwards, how do they use that in their own lives and their own spaces? We are not interested in commissioning the next Bebo or the next MySpace. We are not selling to the next major generic technology platform that will be sold to Google for a large sum. I am interested in designing projects which provide children with opportunities to be empowered and to participate. However, they must also allow the information to be returned to the Web and assimilate into their own spaces.

3. Catering for Audience Preferences

I do not want to commission eight projects next year and then find that half of the 2009 budget is consumed with the maintenance of four of these projects, because we never thought about how we would end them. Having said that, the nature of working in this very conversational way, which involves relinquishing control to the audience, means that the audience will sometimes generate an element of surprise. Projects might travel in unexpected directions. Therefore, we expect each stage of the structure to offer multiple options at some of those stages for ways of operating the project. Otherwise, we may not be able to change direction in a dynamic way as we progress.

4. Narrative Arcs and Technology Partnerships

I am asking you to begin mapping out the narrative arc, which Deborah referred to, of your project. However, it is a narrative arc of the people whose stories you wish to broadcast, the narrative arc of a community you are trying to build with regard to an issue. Then think about how you will deliver that, the partnerships we need, the kinds of technologies we need to invest in, the stories we need to tell.

XV. Web Main Pathway to Reaching Audience

1. Not Using Channel 4 Web Site

Finally, we are not seeking at all to broadcast these products on www.channel4.com. That is for a particular reason, which is that our audience is not present on www.channel4.com. 14-19-yearolds do not use www.channel4.com a lot, except for Hollyoaks and Big Brother when that is being broadcast. Otherwise, the site is not a major destination for this audience. It seems to be a waste of energy to convince them to visit www.channel4.com to participate in these projects.

2. Use Existing Sites to Develop Ideas

For us, the Web is our canvas. I was working at the BBC where that was becoming a common message. If you want to create a site that centres on photography, have discussions with Flickr or Photobucket. If it relates to people writing their life stories, use blogging platforms etc. I am interested in using projects that exist in various parts of the Web, which we link through the stories or the issues we are interested in discussing and broadcasting to this audience.

XVI. Challenging Traditional Storytelling Methods

1. Sites Relevant to Teenagers

In conclusion, we will carry out some activities. We have the opportunity to challenge our conception of the definition of storytelling and how the stories can reach this audience. I want to commission a few projects next year which are quite risky. They centre on relinquishing control to the audience and experimentation. I am not necessarily seeking sites which are well-designed portals for solving hundreds of problems for teenagers. I want sites which tackle very specific projects that are based in the spaces in which the audience are already present and are having those conversations already.

2. Creating Transformative Experiences

It centres on dealing with those issues and transforming the experiences that this audience is having in various ways. These are projects that connect teenagers with others who share the issues. They validate teenagers' experiences. A teenager might feel they have a talent or are experiencing a life event and often the moment of validation provides the empowerment that is needed.

3. Uncertain Shape of Projects

It is very difficult to describe the shape of these projects because they might be present on different sites. They might concern one major event; they might exist in the real world. They might online, on television or the Web. That is the process we want to embark on with you in the next few years. Today, we are trying to capture a group of excellent storytellers, excellent personnel from television and new media. Based on the talent and intelligence of the people attending today, we think that we can discover the shape of these projects.

Questions and Answers

Participant

In a few of the briefings I have attended, the territory to be targeted for that particular year has always been made very clear. I wondered if you have completely considered the areas you want to address.

Matt Locke, Commissioning Editor, Education and New Media

We have received a few projects which we are considering. They deal with issues such as entrepreneurship and innovations. We know that the area of transitions is a major area. However, that issue about becoming older, leaving home, dealing with relationships etc is very broad. At present, we are seeking to discover the nature of these key issues. Deborah made a very good point that we need to cover sexual issues every year, because every generation thinks that they are having sex for the first time.

Deborah Ward, Commissioning Editor, Education

We do this once per year.

Matt Locke

It is only one per year. We are interested in transitional issues. There are two areas that are called entrepreneurship and campaigns. I actually hate those words, because they have a lot of associations. I think they are the right issues to discuss online. Entrepreneurship does not mean using the style of Alan Sugar, developing ways of becoming a successful businessman. However, new businesses are emerging online.

The Internet can carry out a lot of the hard work for children who are interested in business. I am interested in these new forms of entrepreneurship which are not dealing with City Business. They use social networks and more localised methods of production and selling as ways for children to earn money. They offer a third option as well as entering a corporation and accessing education. They deal with niche businesses. Entrepreneurship is probably the wrong word, because it implies major projects.

We also need to reinvent the use of the word campaigns. When you think about campaigns and teenagers, you begin to think of Sting on stage. I think there must be a way of defining campaigns which does not involve rock stars. However, I do not know the shape of that. I assume it will be the type of project which originates at grassroots level and carries resonance for its community. It might not ever arrive in the mainstream media. Therefore, I am interested to learn the definition of campaigning in these new spaces. How are people discussing issues and collaborating to solve problems amongst themselves in the new spaces in ways that do not involve superannuated rock stars. There are a few issues within those particular themes that I think we can reinvent in quite a challenging and exciting way.

Deborah Ward

With regard to seasons, I think it is also fair to say that it comes when there is a level of maturity. It might be the case that a few projects need to be in progress and that the brief will continue to evolve. Continued visits to the 4Producers Web site are definitely to be recommended. This area is so fast-moving, it cannot stay constant

Participant

Will Channel 4 help to broker relationships between TV companies and digital areas, because it is a very confusing world?

Matt Locke

It is absolutely the case. I think we have carried that out already in a few conversations we have had with people. I would agree with you. I worked mainly with the digital independent sector and quite a few people present have worked with the BBC. It does not involve one sector, it involves approximately six. There are mobile and Website specialists, people involved in games and back-end technology, people who carry out design. It is a major area. We are more than content to be of help.

As I say, at present, the issue and the story is our area of interest. If we are interested in that story, we expect to carry out quite a bit of work with you. If we think you have an angle or a story which is particularly unique, then part of the development will involve introducing you to people we think can help you build that. That is what I have learnt from the BBC. I am not a television professional, but I do recognise a lot of people in this audience who are new media personnel.

Participant

Will the pitching process be a very open one, using the 4Producer sites, without knowing what budgets are involved or deadlines? Will all entities be allowed to submit ideas, or will it be more structured?

Deborah Ward

There is always room for any entity to make submissions. We are trying to be as clear as possible. The budget is E5 million. We will probably consider 6-8 projects for next year, because we are quite sure that we should do fewer and bigger projects to guarantee success. I would have thought that two or three of those would have a budget of £1 million. As Matt said, there are probably some others with a budget of £250,000500,000.

Participant

Is that potentially unmanageable?

Deborah Ward

The element which is different is that unlike Radio and Television Commission (RTV) commissions, these projects must encompass phased development in quite a different way. Also, the maintenance and updating and its location once it is established are quite different. When one is budgeting a television programme, it has a fixed period of duration, of 16 weeks for example. It is quite a different process. It may seem to be a major project, but as we are increasingly aware, it is not such a large amount of money. When a new media project is being considered, it is funded in a completely different way from television.

Matt Locke

That is why that structure with stages is very important to me. We want pitchers to understand the right shape of the project, whether it is a two-month project or a two-year project.

Participant

To me, it seems that the difficulty relates to the fact that it could be a very open process, in which any entity, in any location, can submit an idea. We also do not know whether the large budgets have already been availed of by a company that is already effectively involved. You mentioned already that you are in discussions at present. It is difficult to know whether we are meant to be submitting ideas. A budget of £6million is quite small, given how expensive it can be to produce items on the market. It will be quite difficult to know, when proposing ideas, whether it is worthwhile.

Janey Walker

I think we need to put in place a clear method of informing everyone when we have carried out our first commissions. I think commissions will be made in a phased way that is different from the method used for television. However, we are not in that situation now. It is not a case that there are a few definite commitments, we know their nature and we are simply not telling you. The problem is that they are at a very early stage of the discussion. I would say, from the discussions we are having at present, there are definitely some small commissions, and one big one, in which the discussion has not begun. It is not a case that there are a lot of commissions and we are quite comfortable that we have secured enough to meet our requirements for next year. We do not feel comfortable.

Matt Locke

I think the development period will centre on finding the shape of the project. I reiterate that it is the stories and issues we are seeking now. Part of the discussion with you will be about determining the shape of the project and the resources it needed.

Participant

This is relevant for new media. I am accustomed to a situation in which the pitch is carried out, along with developments and the deadline is fixed at a particular date for an idea. They say they are seeking a particular number of ideas. We then aim towards a particular date when developing a proposal. It seems quite strange. Will we be hastening the process of developing ideas?

Deborah Ward

I would like to discuss this. It still relates to editorial. We have always carried out rolling commissions in education. That is partly because of our audience, for whom the world is changing very fast. We must also consider what dominates the media changes. This sparks ideas. We have always had rolling commissions in the last four years. We have never fixed a date. There is an element of flexibility to it. It does not centre on cynicism or determining how much work we will ask people to carry out without using it. It does not centre on that, because only 1-2 people are required to process these submissions, ensure they are operational, run the projects etc. It is a very genuine process.

To encourage you, previously, we had 60 hours to commission for television, with a budget of £6 million. A lot of people submitted for a £100,000 project, which still means creating an idea and moving through the pitching process. It centres on choosing a market which works for you. The Channel 4 element is not just commercial. We are talking about public service, which connects with people in the present, of the present. We are greatly privileged to invest finance into that, instead of investing money on commercial imperatives. As a result, it seems more vague. That is because life is complex and therefore, so is the project.

Participant

My only worry is that this process could be hasty. Most of the budget may be allocated in the first two months and most of it is expended afterwards.

Matt Locke

As Janey says, this will be communicated afterwards. With regard to our usual procedure, you are right. The type of process you described is one in which the commissioners know what message they seek and want to know how the proposal will transmit it. As Deborah says, seeking editorial ideas along with the treatments is a rolling process. However, you are right. I think it centres on informing people whenever we assign a development or full commission.

Deborah Ward

I would suggest that if there is an area you want to pitch, it would be beneficial for you to pitch the draft idea, which has not been refined, within the coming 68 weeks. It is now the middle of June, so that covers both July and August. I would ask you to empathise with Matt. He has to ensure that this material is produced next year. While there will be a rolling commission process, I think it is a good idea to submit an idea sooner rather than later. There is no point in developing it with your team for four months, only for the deadline to have passed. I would say that you should submit by the middle of August. It is not a fixed deadline. However, it provides a psychological advantage. You will not be feeling in September that you need material to develop for next year.

Participant

I am new to this environment. If these projects will not necessarily appear on Channel 4 and there are no broadcasts in relation to that, how can you say that people are becoming aware of the information?

Matt Locke

I think that is what the structure message is. I think that we are not discussing using these different social spaces as marketing for television programmes. However, that is often where the discussion takes place. That is part of the challenge. How will people hear about the project? A variety of tools are available to us. We have marketing teams. We do have the space on the channels. We can use all those options to create awareness of the projects. I want all of those options to be available for every project. For example, with *Skins*, we used MySpace etc, but that centred on using the social spaces to market the television programme. I think we have the opportunity to inform some of these conversations form the structure of the projects. That refers to the creative project, as much as the result on television. We will carry out the marketing with you tactically on each project.

Nick

What about revenue? In some of those spaces, there have been instances in which a project takes on its own momentum. How do you ensure sustainability when considering a project? What is our position on communications that have no known benefit, but are necessary?

Deborah Ward

This is not a bad issue to be considering projects. I feel quite relaxed. We are considering issues which may be interesting for the present, but if we want to sustain them for longer, we would have to consider other ways of funding. However, I think it is important that the primary criteria are laid

down in the first two months or the first year. It depends on how long the project lasts. The reason for commissioning it is because it is thought to be intrinsically worthwhile. We are very happy for people to consider partners, both public and private. Our key criterion is to determine whether it is a new idea, a worthwhile idea. It may well be that if it fits both of these criteria; it is of some value in some location. It is a secondary concern, but we would not eliminate it, because we want to reach as wide an audience as possible with relevant content. Therefore, it may well have value elsewhere.

Participant

A Media season is approaching. Is there any material in that, which is a model for the way you are hoping to operate?

Deborah Ward

No. It is simply a television season which centres on opening the issue.

Janey Walker

We have been quite clear that 2007 is on the previous model. We have invested all our money this year on TV programmes that are broadcast on the morning schedule. The Media season is a part of that, though I do not know how many hours are involved. Although there are a few adjuncts to it that might be described as new media, TV programmes have been the primary focus. Therefore, there is quite a clear distinction between 2007 and 2008.

Deborah Ward

However, I do think this is the hardest year for this brief. You do raise a good point. We would love to show you what projects we have carried out and we will not be at that point until next year. This will be a completely different meeting next year.

Tom

It will be a smaller one. It will be out of date by then. Discussing Skins on MySpace is an example.

Angela

I know you are pondering the line, 'pushing boundaries.' Will you be governed by the same rules as television programmes in this type of space, especially as it is not being broadcast on the Channel 4 brand? How far can we go?

Matt Locke

It is a very hard question to answer, because it relates to marketing and branding. It is a very tactical question. At the BBC, where we were far more paranoid about our brand, the feeling was that if the BBC had less presence in the space and the audience was taking control, control can be relinquished to an extent. There are less issues to be concerned about. However, it is a complex area. The only way to discover boundaries is by promoting projects and seeing what occurs.

Angela

Are there any rules governing whether a broadcaster has different responsibilities to anybody else creating a Web site?

Matt Locke

No. We will have to comply. Channel 4 has a range of policies in relation to content on new media sites. Rather than being restrictive, we want to ensure that we comply with those. Ofcom does not have a role in regulating the Internet, but it does have a role in regulating Public-Service Broadcasting (PSB) content. That is part of the discussion we need to have. We will do that in relation to specific projects. I think it is impossible to create a fixed definition, saying it is not possible to broadcast material in one space, but not in another. It depends on the tone, the audiences involved, the issues being discussed and the ability of people to have a voice and formulate their own response to events. It is a very complex equation and I think we can only test these boundaries and define them by promoting these projects.

Janey Walker

I think you will have to consider the age of the audience that you are aiming at. This is Channel 4 funding, so we must feel satisfied that it is right. That is the main criteria that we will use.

Tom

As a digital-media professional, I probably know a little more about the TV Plus area. You discussed the structure of the new-media products a great deal, how they are built up and then disappear again. However, you did not discuss TV Plus.

Janey Walker

Channel 4 broadcasts a lot of educational programming during peak time, including history, science, unteachable areas etc. I think it would be worthwhile for us, in considering 2008, whether there are a number of projects we would be interested in developing further in some ways. By that, I do not mean specially commissioned clips directly related to that programme. However, I think it is worth considering. It relates to what was said. If we are not using www.channel4.com, we should not bypass the opportunities in major popular programmes which are educational. Are there areas we should consider which are tangents of those?

Matt Locke

We are currently in communications with a number of the commissioners. One of the ideas I am planning on introducing, though I have not done so yet, is the creation of a type of lab. This is a format used by the BBC, so we may gather a few briefs from some of these programmes for next year. We would then broadcast them to people pitching ideas and then develop those ideas in early autumn of this year. That might be a separate call for projects related to some of the TV projects for next year, which we will explore at a lab.

With regard to the shape of these projects, it does not centre on the Web site about the television programme. Probably the best model I could give is Preloaded. They carried out a project called CDX for the Rome series. They carried out quite an interesting project for Rome, which is the

major HBO collaboration with the BBC. It relates to history and similar issues. They used the strands of the story to create an online game with very high production values and which was very compelling for that audience.

It is an autonomous product and experience that transferred a lot of the educational content and narrative of Rome as a TV programme. I do not want to merely commission games, but I am interested in that ambition, to use the themes of stories from other TV programmes to create an autonomous proposition for the 14-19-year-old audience. It does not just centre on Web sites for television.

Participant

I am interested in discovering how comfortable you are with open pitches. If you are discussing entrepreneurship, campaigning and working in social spaces, then to a degree, you must be very reactive to the community's activities. You must be agile. It is hard to create a design, as it is hard to predict. What is your feeling about pitching the process methodology as much as the final project?

Janey Walker

I think we are quite clear. We will not always know what the final product is. We will have phases and we need to respond when we know what the response is.

Matt Locke

I think you can consider that using a staged structure. There might be a model for the project which accommodates different directions, but the audience can still provide an element of surprise and take a new direction. For the sake of my own sanity, I want to limit that to a few commissions per year and to have a few other projects which are a little more rigid. However, we will definitely need to learn that method.

Participant

Within the functionality that Channel 4 has, do you have any structure which you have invested in during the past 18 months?

Matt Locke

Is this with regard to supporting particular applications on the Web?

Participant

Yes. I am interested in existing applications.

Matt Locke

There are a few. However, coming from the BBC, where there was a great deal more investment in new media, there is very little. There are some clips data bases and some Web site functionality. They are adequate, but I would rather use YouTube, Flickr and Facebook as platforms, because that

is where our audience is present. However, there are a few and it is possible. If anyone wants that information, we could organise that as part of the development. We can provide briefings with the technical teams as part of the development deal. That is all possible.

Participant

What is your format for piloting? I would like to know if there are piloting details.

Deborah Ward

There is an online submission system.

Matt Locke

They are currently relevant for television programmes, so simply use the resource as freely and as often as possible.

Janey Walker

The reason we are very enthusiastic about that is because it saves Becky Macklin a lot of inconvenience. Generating letters of response to every proposal is very time consuming. Therefore, with regard to initial ideas submitted to us, we are quite insistent that you use the online system.

Participant

Can you provide us with some guidance about the topics you feel are covered in the most relevant proposals you seek? It is possible to submit a very interesting, attractive proposal with good content, but you may not feel that the issue is an area you want to deal with. The same attractive idea could be used for a different issue, so it could be developed further.

Matt Locke

It is a story and an issue.

Participant

It could be an issue with an attractive element, but what do you think is the issue?

Matt Locke

I think we have very strong ideas, as demonstrated in Deborah's show reel. Channel 4 is about storytelling, whether we are telling the stories or our audience is. I think the story and the issue are of primary importance. If there is an area which excites us, that we think is very interesting and compelling to that audience, then the technology platform is secondary. I would be more willing to consider a strong story or issue and find a strong, interactive treatment for it, than use a generic technology platform and struggle to find an issue.

Janey Walker

This is quite an important area. There is a transition. You could see in a tangible way how a TV programme had covered an issue. Our problem with it was that it was being broadcast in the morning, so few people of the target age range were seeing it. I think it is primarily the issue. I think the question of the reach of the programme and who it will target is important.

Participant 10

With regard to the TV schedule, are there programmes which are being broadcast across the platform, or submission ideas which might be viable for more than one show?

Janey Walker

I think that when we were in discussions about a project, we would be discussing the series it originated from that we would be showing in the morning schedule.

Participant 11

From your research, are you particularly conscious of commissions that will attract certain age groups? Are you really targeting major users who will be at the top end of the 14-19 age group? Otherwise, are you specifically seeking to encourage a younger clientele, of 14-16? From your research, is there enough of a divide to warrant targeting smaller sections of the overall group.

Matt Locke

I think there is a division in attitude. Being a 14-year-old is very different from being a 19-year-old. There is a split with regard to technology access as well. Before teenagers earn money, their access to technology is limited. Their access to events is greatly limited. It does not simply centre on technology; it centres on a teenager's ability to participate in an event, which is more limited. That raises some interesting challenges about who you are aiming to design projects for.

I would emphasise that although we are discussing technology, I am equally interested in real-world events as I am in items in Bebo and Facebook. For me, the issue centres on the social spaces, the quality of those social spaces and the conversations teenagers have in those social spaces. It is not just about on a fashionable Web site. There are issues about how much access people have to various ways of expressing themselves, meeting people and discussing their lives. These are different in a younger age group. Therefore, that represents another challenge.

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