

Speech: OPuS (Oxford Publishing Society)
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Title: Migration from print-based stories to digital experiences

Graphic Title page

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here this evening. As an All Black supporting (sorry, had to get that in) Kiwi abroad, it is always a pleasure to travel whenever I can, and Oxford is no exception. In fact, only a few years back I used to lecture in a theatre just like this at Victoria University in Wellington while I was studying for my PhD – so I feel completely at home in this environment. In that vein, please forgive me if I throw a few statistics your way in a hope that it might support my argument - - Undoubtedly, with so many academics living close by, the thought of presenting without the necessary theoretical constructs might not bode well ... (even if I did study postmodernism!)

The topic of tonight's conference is very interesting and indeed timely - particularly the reference to a "brave new world" Hmm, well is it *really*? For people like Kirk and myself who have worked in the music and communications industry respectively for many years prior to this venture, we don't think it's a brave new world at all. In fact, we believe that the migration from print to digital is merely a natural evolution as itunes was to the record industry. Publishers may indeed have a different view as they cling to the romanticism of FedExing paper manuscripts or working and editing in word, but as I say to them and will say here again tonight, publishers are no longer in the business of publishing books – they are in the business of publishing authors – in what ever format or immersive experience the author and the consumer demands.

It's an interesting fact that on average, every UK family has 10 digital devices in their households and of that, over 30% are consuming their books on tablets. Since 2007 with the advent of the first iPhone, consumers around the world have downloaded more than 100 billion apps from the app store. When you think of these kinds of numbers, it can hardly be described as a "brave new world" but more – ignore transmedia at your peril and risk missing the boat to that "brave new world" entirely"

We at BeyondTheStory recognized this emerging growth of digital consumption in 2009 and after several months of thinking, talking about and eventually writing the business case, we hung our shingle and begun to develop a full transmedia publishing solution for publishers, TV and film studios. Kirk's job was to conceptualize and develop the 'beast' we now lovingly refer to as Publisher Plus while I made sure we raised (and continue to do so) the investment to make our vision a reality. As such, BeyondtheStory now creates immersive apps using state of the art technology to enhance the reading

experience, and add value with augmented narratives for films and television studios.

For us, the narrative is at the heart of the transformation.

As more people choose to read on digital devices, then our focus has been to transform linear narratives into dynamic storytelling experiences, making full use of our technology under the readers' fingers, while always anchoring the reader in the author's text.

So fast has been the evolution of print-based stories and content to digital experiences, that the new technology is as awesome as the stories of magical realism or new objectivity.

What happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe."

Matthew C. Strecher Journal of Japanese Studies

From reading to storytelling - the reader is at the heart of a rich multi-media world where, at the touch of the screen, they can look beyond the story and enter the world of the people, places and objects they are reading about.

As technology has evolved, so the commercialisation of digital devices has opened up new possibilities.

Infographic From text to pixels

Reconnecting Storytellers and their audiences

Here, at the tail end of 2013, there are many organisations in our commercial space offering digital services to the publishing industry. These services are typically about taking edited manuscripts and transforming them into electronic formats for reading on handheld devices. Books on screens.

But we approach this from a different philosophical angle. Our desire is not to be simply another 'final mile' solution for publishers. We're going back to the nature of storytelling itself, and giving the storytelling industries a new means to connect with readers and audiences.

Storytelling, in person, is a conscious act by those gifted to do it, engaging others around them. It's not a one-way train, but rather a relationship between the storyteller and the listener. Even though only one person may be doing most of the talking, it's interactive, with the storyteller modifying the ebb and flow of the narrative as he or she studies the faces and reactions of those listening. Skilled storytellers have a dynamic way with words, and the reader is a key participant. Real storytellers cannot hide behind a typewriter or a word processor. For their full story to be told in its deepest colours, they must have that relationship with the reader.

Imagine J.R.R. Tolkien, having put out the last coals on the hearth on a wintry evening, sitting up close with his excited sons as he told them – as he did – the

early forms of the tales that would go on to become part his Middle-earth cycle. The sleepy children are engaged with the story, hanging off every word, questioning every turn, and sending their father off on tangents he had not prepared. This is storytelling at its best, at its most personal, and, indeed, at its most truthful.

We can't bring Professor Tolkien into every child's room. But we can provide storytellers with the means to expand their stories beyond words themselves, to give new digital readers the opportunity to explore great stories using the technology they keep close to them throughout the day. This is why we're developing the Beyond The Story publishing platform, to capture stories as they come to life, to bring the new reader closer to the context and colour of the story.

But why stick to just books? Let's think about transmedia publishing.

TV and Film Studios are looking how to provide a whole new wave of content for their fans to extend their investment in content, using non-linear digital realities. This can be in the form of companion apps, original narratives and novelisations of film and TV shows, and integrating books and film and TV show content into one new asset. And why do they do this? Because film and television directors simply love the story.

The Almighty Johnsons

We produced this companion app to the cult Kiwi series made in partnership with All3Media. Here we have connected visual entertainment with a specially written linear narrative in the form of a 13 part novelisation. Now we can tell the story but we have provided the show's creators with a way to expand their storytelling and bring their viewers into a fully interactive experience, show by show in the series.

A fragmented marketplace and it's a horror story really

Here we see an environment of vendors, libraries and devices – and on those devices a range of interactivity. Confused? Yes and it's easy to do.

The problem is everyone has their own marketplace – and this makes for a troubled landscape and challenges as the sector addresses disruption.

Infographic Reading for the Touch Generation

How do we address this disruption?

Booksellers, the publishing industry, authors, and TV and Film studios are all thinking about how they can use new tools and technology to publish in new digital formats. There is a lot of 'talk' but not a lot of realistic action

So 'Imagine' a situation where authors, publishers and everyone in the workflow of a successful book, or a narrative such as a companion app for a film or TV series, can work together using a simple, time and cost-effective process.

Publisher Plus allows for the creation of all digital formats of our books, from a physical book, to a standard ePub to an immersive 3D apps, from within one single word-processing application.

The perfect solution for storytellers

For the first time ever, Publisher Plus allows our partners to generate new income streams from their assets using one software solution. No more do authors, editors; curators, designers and developers need to use a multiplicity of tools to produce a printed book, an ebook or an animated app. One system, all working in concert and allowing people to work concurrently cutting the process by a third (if not more)

Our revenue model which will be launched in the 2nd quarter of the new year will provide customers with their own licensed version of the platform, with revenues derived from the development, together with transactional and licensing income. Imagine – all this, and all yours to command and control.

The disruption of precedents from other sectors are there to excite our thinking – the business models of Netflix, iPlayer, Spotify.

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

In the publishing business we can have it all, but one thing we can not have is the ability to stop evolution in whatever forms it is taking right now. So the questions begs: How insane are you?

Thank you

/Ends

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