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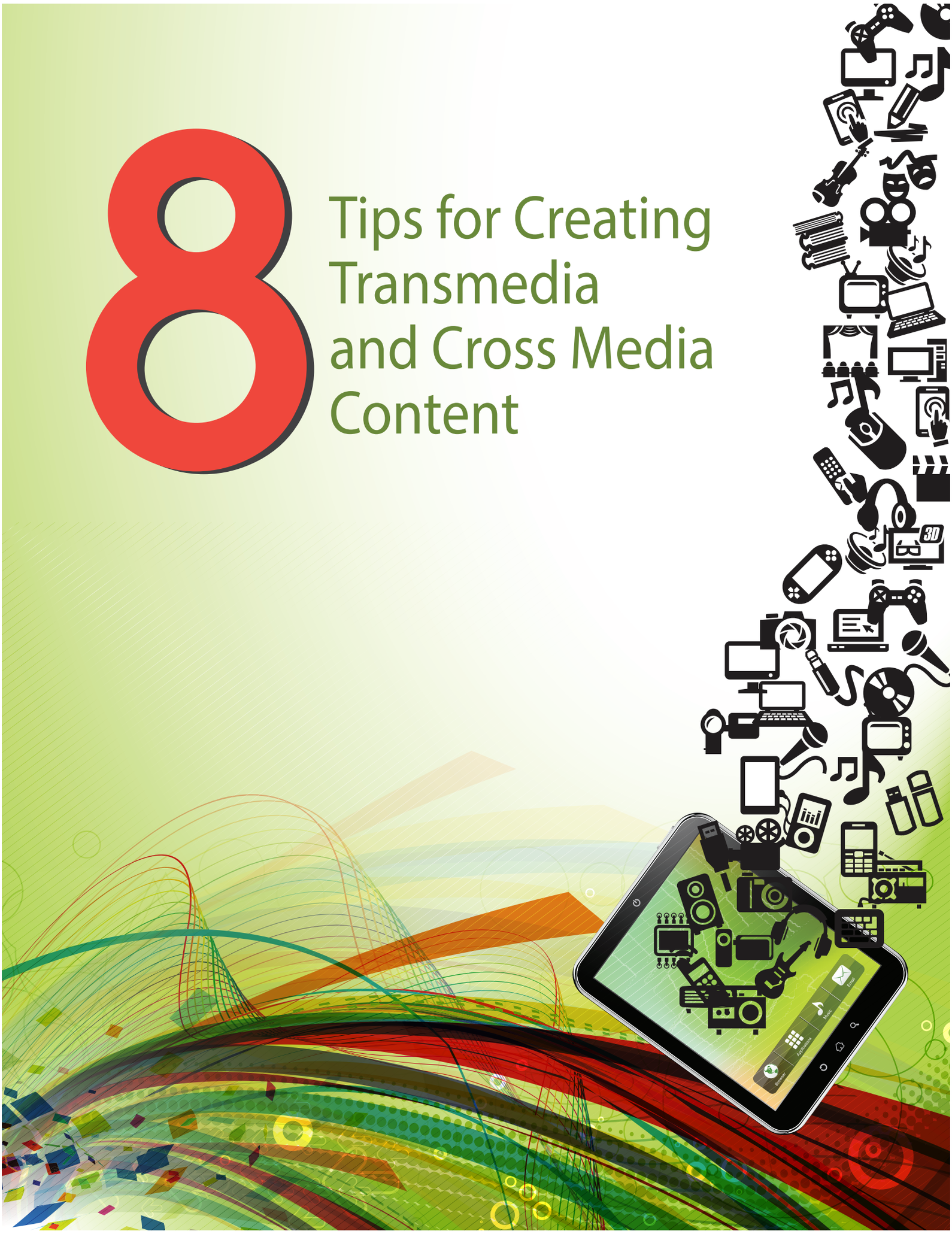


8 Tips for Creating Transmedia and Cross Media Content

By Kate McCallum

Branded content? Cross media? Transmedia? The concept of transmedia has been controversial at times and the definition is not always unanimously agreed upon, but as I would simply define the term, it is the art and practice of telling a story in unique ways across the transom of media platforms and experiences. Together, these different expressions of the story combine to make up a greater story experience. You may have read the first white paper I wrote for Createasphere on the topic of Transmedia. If not, please do so as it will give you an informative introduction to the topic.

Download the Transmedia White Paper here.

Since writing that paper I have had the very good fortune to join Createasphere as a consultant to chair, help design, program and launch an exciting new conference for Createasphere called the TransVergence Summit. This Summit will explore transmedia and convergence in storytelling and marketing in the entertainment, and advertising industries with special emphasis on the radical shifts occurring in these businesses inspired by newly emerging technologies and platforms.

Let's look at television for an example of this shift; in the past, audiences first fragmented across the primary networks to a growing numbers of cable channels, often niche related. From there they fragmented across service providers such as satellite and telco as they became new options for receiving television content.

Today's audience is now timeshifting and fragmenting across a variety of services and devices: TVs, Tivo, set top boxes, Netflix, computers, pads and mobile devices — often simultaneously — to view the content they want to view anytime anywhere. I define this evolving phenomenon as "TransDigital Blur". To bring this blur into better focus, content providers (be they creators, broadcasters, operators, advertisers or corporate) can look to transmedia and cross platform storytelling for solutions. I personally prefer the term cross platform over cross media as extended story and brand experiences can also be non-media related such as live theater, live experiential or in person group experiences such as ARGs: Alternative Reality Games.

The Topic: How can Transmedia help you?

We feel that transmedia and cross platform storytelling is the common denominator amongst content creators in both the worlds of entertainment, advertising and marketing industries. Great stories that engage audiences, fans and or consumers are essential to the evolution of communication and influence. The lines between these worlds are blurring. And what is creating the blur? Primarily — story and the desire for the audience and the customer to interact and engage at deeper and more personal levels. Why? Technology and the multi-screen digital universe offer freedom of choice. As more and more devices offer customers the ability to engage with content anywhere anytime, transmedia is no longer a progressive good idea, it's a necessary aspect of effective storytelling and content creation.

My Own "Story" as relevant to understanding transmedia and cross platform storytelling:

As a longtime arts and entertainment industry professional, my background has been rooted in storytelling and content creation, having spent most of my career working closely with some of the top storytellers and authors in the world at Universal and Paramount Studios on such primetime television shows as "The Equalizer," "Miami Vice," "Law & Order," "Charles In Charge," etc., and with screenwriters of feature films such as "Doc Hollywood," "Manchurian Candidate," "Any Given Sunday," "Quigley Down Under" and more. During the eight years I spent as a Creative Development Executive and Producer with Western Sandblast, a production entity with an

exclusive TV deal at Paramount Studios, I learned the nuances of story development, intellectual properties and rights management, and how to option and license materials from other mediums with the potential for this varied content to become TV movies, non-fiction or fictional series, and or feature films.

My first exposure to "transmedia" as a concept came from a colleague and mentor, Robert Gould, who founded what he defined as a transmedia company called Imaginosis. He launched Imaginosis in the late 1990s after having worked as a VP of Creative Development at Sony Studios. Robert's primary clients are Comic Con favorites Brian and Wendy Froud, famed for their work creating imagery, costumes and creatures for such feature films as the Henson classics "Dark Crystal" and "Labyrinth," and for writing and illustrating such classic bestselling specialized picture books such as "Good Fairies/ Bad Fairies" and "Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Book." Robert brought the highly visual "World of Froud" to the web, developed and expanded the Froud brand into additional books, music recordings, a popular fairy festival, wine labels, clothing, gaming cards, statuary, dolls, live music experiences and more. He works to create story threads that emanate from the core story world of the Froud brand into these multiple platforms.

What I learned? Core IP has intrinsic value.

Again, the value of story and intellectual property, or a brand, is always at the core of development work. Many movies and television programs are based on other content such as novels, comics, magazine or newspaper articles. In fact, the first TV movie that I was credited on as a Producer, NBC's "What Kind of Mother Are You?" came from a life rights story that I optioned from a local newspaper.

Games, toys, operas, graphic novels, visual art, stage plays, documentaries, older television shows, libraries from feature films to clips, brand icons, theme park attractions, web content, etc. — are all core IP that hold potential to live and extend a story into in other media platforms or experiences.

Each of the tips that follow comes from professional experience or observations I have made along my own career path. I am sharing these with you in a more personal story form as doing so may also inspire you to discover how your own professional experience can serve to activate your creativity towards designing transmedia strategy.

Transmedia Tip #1 – The Story World Bible

When creating a new television show concept, producers and writers create a TV series bible. Depending on the genre form of the series (fiction/non-fiction/reality, etc.), these bibles contain the overview of the show concept and the world the series takes place in, descriptions of the main and secondary characters which include their backstories, examples of up to 13 or more episode storylines, relevant ancillary content such as articles, data or facts, and in some cases a full spec script. Often a sizzle reel is also created that demonstrates a sample of the look and feel of a show concept. The bible is a necessary tool needed to pitch a series idea to the buyers.

The show bible is also similar to an important tool needed in transmedia strategy design — a "Story World Bible and Style Guide." And — most great screenwriters spend hours of preparatory time developing out character backstories and histories — this research all translates into rich material that can be built into and used for story world content.

Transmedia Tip #2 – Timeline

Another way to add dimension to a story world is to think along the continuum timeline of the past, present and future when modeling these rich story worlds or mining the gold in a brand's story. Think about the creation of the "prequel" film trilogy created for the "Star Wars" franchise as an example. These stories were created and released 16 years after the original "Star Wars" trilogy was released. The stories expanded the "Star Wars" universe by taking us back in time to explore the characters and history of the "Star Wars" world prior to the period of the original film.

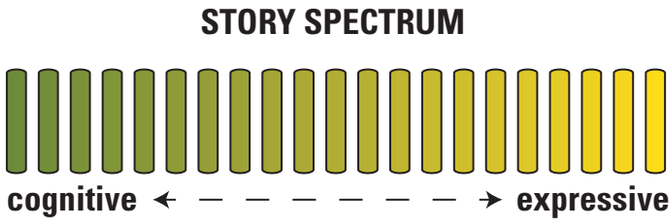
The purpose of the story world content is to create a world with references to the ethos, the characters and their deep backstories, differing interactive potential for other characters to extend from the story and to create a sense of the style, geography and/or map of the world and the rules and canon of that world. Finally, it becomes the source from which to develop rich material whereby the audience can engage in the world at deeper, more diverse and personal levels. This also becomes an important document that other stakeholders can reference to create from and or maintain a sense of continuity when extending the story or brand.

What I learned next? The "Spectrum of Story" Concept.

In 2006, I launched my own IP development and consulting company, Bridge Arts Media, LLC, and departed from the studios when I was hired as a VP of Programming for The Harmony Channel, an innovative visual music channel that aired on Comcast VoD. We licensed and programmed a vast array of music-based visual content in the vein of "Samsara" and "Baraka," into "mood zones," and had a successful run of about seven months to over 11 million Comcast homes. Without the investment money we were hoping for, we couldn't properly market the channel, but when the audience did find and experience the channel they loved it! Unfortunately, numbers and metrics matter and, ironically, we lost our slot to the Fear Channel who was getting higher ratings numbers. It was during my time working with artists and musicians in this format that I discovered a new kind of "story" that could deeply influence people — one told through visuals and sound, but — no less a story.

Transmedia Tip #3 – Story Spectrum

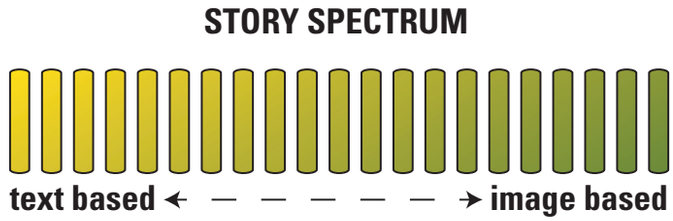
When brainstorming story world concepts and potential transmedia ideas, in addition to thinking along a timeline of past, present and future from a linear perspective, also think along the cognitive, emotional, expressive, and the text and visual spectrum of the story. Using this graph can help creators think about new ways to explore and create story elements in a larger story world.



In thinking about the different expressions and qualities that make up types of stories, I came to define "stories" along a spectrum ranging from pure cognitive, such as informational based non fiction media like the news or documentaries, through reality programming to narrative fictional content, all the way to purely expressive, such as visuals and music based content.

At a recent conference I attended on the future of television, much of the conversation revolved around frustrations consumers reported about the challenge of content discovery. Innovative tech companies exhibiting there featured solutions to replace the dry, clunky text based menus provided by many operators with stimulating visual image searches that would work across the entire screen ecosystems.

As trends in social media lead the way, successful brands such as Pinterest has inspired eBay to change their site style formatting to a more pictorial based user experience. Imagery is taking preference over text in the social space.



A famous axiom in the screenwriting world is "show, don't tell" or "show it, don't say it." I'm not sure which early screenwriters should be credited for these quotes, but I do know that this is one of the first rules of powerful storytelling in the visual mediums.

I believe that we are poised on the verge of a visual content revolution, which is also a more global language.

Transmedia Tip #4 – Orchestrated Media

Think of transmedia storytelling like an orchestra. Each instrument stands alone uniquely but together something symphonically great is created when the orchestra performs as a whole. The term Orchestrated Media takes on a whole new meaning — meaning that in transmedia storytelling the story is not just retold in a new format, but is expressed uniquely depending upon the platform it is being told through.

For example, the television series is not the necessarily the same content delivered on your cell phone, it's the main character's secret journal or social media page that may be, thus more deeply engaging your viewer in an aspect of the story that contributes to the whole but offers a unique perspective into the story world.

Transmedia Tip #5 – Audience Niche

Designing to Reach a New Demographic or Audience Niche

Ask yourself how to tell an aspect of your story to a new audience? Can there be an adult version of a story and or also a more youthful or contemporary version of the core IP told and presented in a new way suited to the platform that will attract an new audience to your story world or brand?

The story continues...

From the stint with Harmony Channel, I (as a closeted classically trained dramatic soprano — who knew!?) was hired to join the staff at LA Opera where I was fortunate to work closely with the COO of LAO, Edgar Baitzel, and Maestro Placido Domingo. During my time with the opera, the marketing department was challenged to attract new audiences in order to sell more tickets and subscriptions. The opera licensed the story rights and produced an operatic version of "The Fly" with director David Cronenberg. They also optioned the story rights to the Oscar winning film "Il Postino" which successfully premiered as an opera starring Domingo as the famed poet Neruda. Opera — yet another experiential platform for a story to come to life in new ways! Film stories translated well to the opera stage and were effective at expanding the demographic range of the audience. The opera wanted to attract new and younger fans and they did. They also wanted to deepen the LA Opera brand identity in the opera world by creating opera inspired by cinema and contemporary entertainment.

Over the last three years, I have taken the leap into the brave new world of freelancing and entrepreneurship by continuing to develop Bridge Arts Media, LLC and serving as a freelance producer, or creative development and transmedia consultant to a variety of companies and growing number of clients.

Transmedia Tip #6 – VidBlogging & Blogging

VidBlogging and Blogging are Economically Viable and Powerful Vehicles to Express Aspects of Your Story World.

VidBlogging or blogging can be a way to deliver a "brand" or story perspective. The content created by a VidBlogger or Blogger becomes IP. This IP can be the basis from which to create a story or brand concept which can be expanded upon to create other media experiences. Can you begin to grow your concept from a blog? As talent, this a launch pad for your persona or a character to evolve from as well.

In 2011 I was hired by Simplynew to co-produce 240 episodes of "VidBlogger Nation," which primary Marc Scarpa touted as the first "Social Media Television Channel." VBN aired as a VoD channel on Comcast and featured 10 VidBloggers who were selected for their filmmaking skills and their ability to create a robust presence online.

While I worked with Marc and his team to produce VidBlogger Nation, he was also busy creating participatory experiences in prime-time TV.

For the U.S. launch of Simon Cowell's international hit television competition, "The X Factor," Sony Music brought Marc Scarpa in to produce and direct a completely integrated second-screen experience and live digital pre-show. In addition to watching "The X Factor" live on television, the audience was now able to participate on multiple platforms in real-time.

Participants could begin online with the Pepsi Preshow one hour prior to each live televised broadcast. As the pre-show ended, participants would engage in extended second screen story lines through the Xtra Factor App on their tablets. Programming included live Twitter conversation with the judges and contestants, access to backstage cameras, galleries from past performances, information about contestants' hometowns and the option download contestants' song choices as they were being performed.

The audience's viewing habits of using second and third screens while watching content has created an opportunity for creators to provide deeper story engagement at the same time they are airing their primary content.

Transmedia Tip #7 – New Emerging Platforms

Think About How Aspects of Your Story Can Be Told Through New Emerging Platforms

Since 2009, I have been working as a transmedia consultant for various companies including Vortex Immersion Media, a company that specializes in immersive experiences using new technologies such as; interactive media, architectural projections, touch screens and 360 fulldome space. Vortex also maintains a 50 foot R&D development and presentation dome, so I work with Vortex to create a slate of original fulldome content projects and I also co-designed the AIR: Artist In Residence program for them in an effort to help train creators and artists in the fulldome storytelling space.

We have successfully presented several 360 fulldome productions, including "Migrations" which also launched as two soundtracks under the Art of Sound, a music and arts label under Bridge Arts Media. Recently, we premiered two live 360 immersive dance and music performances in The Vortex Dome called "Blue Apple" and "Bollydolls." Marketing reps from top brands were in the audience. The creator of Bollydoll, Amrita Sen is launching a line of clothing and accessories with Macys from the same original artwork created for the book, musical and fulldome experience.

What I've Learned?

How to create in other new media format platforms as a launching pad for a story world IP and the potential of new platform, live experiences to become branded content.

Transmedia Tip #8 – Experiences

Think about how to story your brand through live events, interactive and immersive experiences.

From more traditional film and broadcast TV storytelling, I have been following my passion and moving through the worlds of new emerging platforms and technologies, all requiring that we think about and effectively use a transmedia strategy design. In addition to the creative content initiative that Vortex is fostering, they also have experience and are gaining a very strong presence in the corporate branding space and have successfully produced interactive live event campaigns using large inflatable domes to feature Microsoft Kinect at the Super Bowl, Nike at the NBA playoffs, and at SXSW they presented a fulldome experience to launch a new phone for Nokia. Recently, Vortex was hired by Riot Games to create projection enhancements at a live e-game worldwide championship playoff of their highly successful, massive multi-player on line game, League of Legends. Two competing teams of gamers vied for a $1 million dollar prize and played live, in front of an audience of approximately 8,000+ fans at a sporting venue in Los Angeles.

What I've Learned?

The highly creative world of Corporate Brands, Advertising and Marketing offers tremendous opportunity for transmedia storytelling.

Upon joining the staff at Createasphere to help design the [TransVergence Summit](), their new conference offering, I have done extensive research into identifying those individuals and brands that are utilizing a transmedia approach. Our Governing Board is made up of several individuals who represent international expertise in the field. As we have been working to identify participants and speakers who can help bring more awareness to this exciting and rapidly emerging trend in storytelling, what I have also discovered is that the flip side of entertainment and the arts — the world of marketing and advertising brands are also innovating to more deeply engage audiences and consumers through multi-platform and story through the creation and use of "Branded Content" or "Branded Entertainment."

Not that this is a new concept. In 1947 NBC presented the first drama television anthology — Kraft Television Theater which was soon followed by The Ford Theater, Philco Television Playhouse, General Electric Theater (hosted by Ronald Reagan) and the United States Steel Hour. We also can recall the launch of Hallmark Hall of Fame on NBC in 1951 which has now evolved into The Hallmark Channel.

What is different now is that the media landscape has expanded beyond the TV set and media is ubiquitous. This is requiring, at some level, that every company and brand become a publisher or media station, thus Branded Content 2.0.

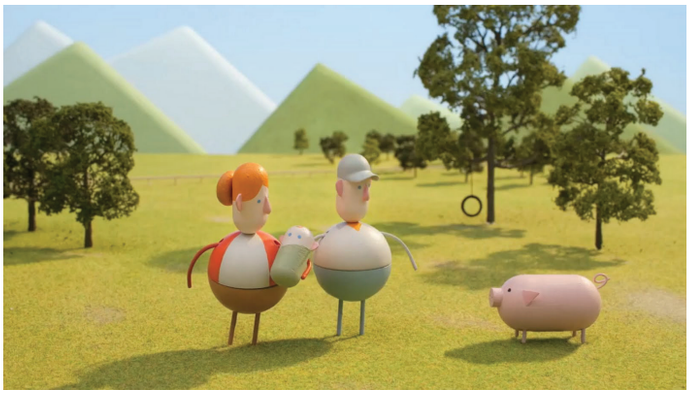
Other transmedia trivia of interest

Don't forget radio as a content platform! Did you know that one of the most successful syndicated series of all times, "Death Valley Days," was originally a radio show that launched in 1930 by Ruth Woodman. It ran on radio until 1945 then made its TV debut on March 1, 1952 and ran until 1975.

The experts on branded content

Leaders in this field have joined our Governing Board: Doug Scott; president of Branded Entertainment with Olgivy; Jeremiah Rosen of Campfire; Avi Savar; and Jae Goodman.

Avi is a founder and CCO of Big Fuel, a social media agency based in New York. He also recently served as Jury President for the new category of Branded Content and Entertainment for the Cannes Lions Grand Prix Award. The 2012 Award went to Chipotle and CAA for the burrito brand's sustainable farming "Cultivate" campaign which was produced by Jae Goodman, CAA Co-Head and Chief Creative Officer at CAA Marketing and another member of our Governing Committee.



I've had a chance to speak with Avi about trends in Branded Content and what his company was doing to address this growing strategy of telling stories to help brands create identity. Meet Avi and learn about the first Grand Prix Branded Content 2012 winner, Chipotle, here: Branded Content Video (courtesy of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity).

Through research we've also identified other great examples of branded content. Proctor & Gamble publishes an online social platform called "Homemade Simple." The "Homemade Simple" website offers content that contains useful homemaking tips, decorating ideas, recipes, seasonal ideas, and also coupons and special offerings from its range of relevant brand offerings. In addition to serving as a content rich publishing site, Homemade Simple is also a weekly television series airing on the Oprah Channel.

Entertainment and information as marketing.

Sears has created a similar offering for their customers interested in health and fitness. Instead of just on online store, they have designed a website rich in editorial content called FitStudio.

They describe FitStudio as "an innovative health and fitness community that arms customers with the resources they need to live a fit life."

Their offerings include:

- Workout Library: A library of free, video-based workouts that can be immediately integrated into a daily routine.
- FitStudio Programs: Exclusive multi-day exercise programs that include daily workout regimes and health tips delivered to community member's inboxes.
- Living Healthy: Articles, tips, ideas and videos from a network of experts.
- They also include a team of eight experts in the field of fitness and health as representatives.
- Lastly, at the far right of the navigation bar is a button called GEAR. Here visitors to the site can view and purchase from an online catalogue of Sear's fitness equipment and merchandise.

Another example of Branded Content can be found under the title of "Goldfishsmiles" which is a site presented by Pepperidge Farms. Their famous goldfish crackers come to life as animated characters that entertain and engage the children and their parents with fun for the whole family.

Lastly, as Hollywood storytellers get more involved with branded content, we see innovative examples of transmedia through such collaborations as Nokia teaming up with Executive Producer, Writer and Creator Tim Kring ("Heroes," "Touch") to create the innovative project "Conspiracy for Good," a mixed-media, live immersive experience that not only helped to promote Nokia the brand but also fulfilled a philanthropic mission of financial support for libraries in Africa.

In conclusion

The same rules apply to the development of high quality effective content creation whether it is entertainment or advertising. Consider your audience and consumer base. Give them compelling, rich worlds and stories to explore with characters who transform against challenges and struggles. Engage them and use these new media tools wisely.

More Transmedia Takeaways

Three Reasons to Use Transmedia Storytelling
Dr. Pamela Rutledge, Director of the Media Psychology Research Center in Palo Alto, California
www.pamelarutledge.com

These are three reasons why you should be using transmedia storytelling for branding, marketing, and advocacy campaigns:

1. PERSUASION:
Transmedia stories are the most fundamental and immersive form of communication, engaging our brains at the intuitive, sensory and executive levels

2. AUDIENCE CONNECTION:
Transmedia strategies create many points of entry that reach and link multiple demographics and target different user needs to effectively expand the customer base

3. FINANCIAL IMPACT:
Transmedia storytelling redefines ROI, extends brand shelf life and can create value-added IP assets and ancillary revenue streams.

In additional to Dr. Rutledge's Reasons to Use Transmedia Storytelling, I would add these suggestions as well:

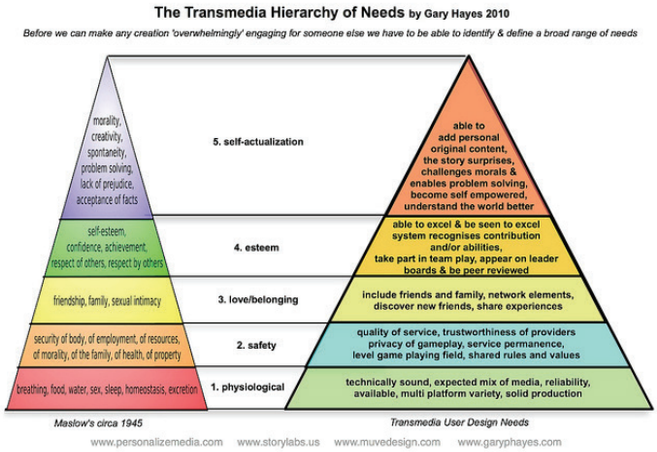
4. EDUCATION, SOCIAL GOOD AND PHILANTHROPY:
A transmedia approach inspires the creator to include consideration of story threads that engage a brand and/or story as educational curriculum and/or experiences with social and philanthropic messaging and/or campaigns without taking away from the goal of entertaining or selling.

5. TRENDS AWARENESS:
Transmedia naturally encourages creators to stay on top of trends in emerging technologies, communication and art genre and format trends.

6. IP OWNERSHIP:
The transmedia approach combined with the democratization of media, offers creators the opportunity to created intellectual properties that they own and control out of the gate that can then be built upon. In the past the technologies and distribution platforms were so costly and the walls so high that they inhibited entry.

7. CREATIVE FULFILLMENT:
The world of transmedia is very enriching and inspiring and offers a wide array of creative strategies and opportunities, resulting in tremendous self-actualization at a creative level. I especially like the graphic below created by Gary Hayes, transmedia producer and also a member of our Governing Board.

Click here to enlarge.



The TransVergence Summit

Createasphere is launching the TransVergence Summit in Los Angeles on March 19-20, 2013 and New York in the fall of 2013.

Interestingly enough, when Googling the word "transvergence" it is not yet formally listed in a dictionary, but one can find several definitions for it in arts theory literature. It is more often than not described as "transdisciplinary art," which so aptly represents our rapidly changing times as well as the underlying concept behind transmedia and cross platform storytelling. A good word, indeed for where we as communicators and storytellers find ourselves in these exciting and shifting times.

transvergencesummit.com

Kate McCallum

Createasphere's TransVergence Chair and Co-Creator

Transmedia Consultant/Producer/Writer and President and Founder Bridge Arts Media, LLC.

Transmedia Consultant/Producer and Writer, Kate McCallum, President and Founder of Bridge Arts Media, LLC (BAM). BAM is a transmedia development and traditional and new media production entity located in Los Angeles. BAM specializes in developing unique intellectual properties and storyworlds in a variety of media and arts platforms. From print and publishing, to the ART OF SOUND, an arts and media 360 label, live events and fulldome content, Bridge Arts Media, LLC provides transformative entertainment content and experiential experiences. Kate also offers her services as a transmedia consultant and has worked with such clients as Orb Media Group, Createasphere, 3DTV, Reel FX and Vortex Immersion Media, etc. In 2004 Kate founded the c3: Center for Conscious Creativity, a 501c3 public charity, whose mission is to "Create a better future through arts and media," and she also serves as the Chair of a Global Arts and Media Node for The Millennium Project, a global futurist think tank made up of over 3000+ members worldwide. Kate is an active member of the PGA: Producers Guild of America New Media Council and is a member of the ATAS: Academy of Television Arts and Sciences TV Executive Peer Group. She is also a member of the WFSF: World Future Studies Federation and often speaks on the future of media, transmedia and the power of the arts to transform.

www.bridgeartsmedia.com
www.vorteximmersion.com
www.consciouscreativity.org