



OPEN RIGHTS GROUP

Creative Business in the Digital Era

Case Study 3: David Bausola and *Where are the Joneses?*

March 2008

Prepared by Michael Holloway

For more information, contact:

+44 (0) 20 7096 1079

7th floor, 100 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8AL

info@openrightsgroup.org

www.openrightsgroup.org

Executive Summary

David Bausola is a creative technologist at communications agency Imagination who, together with Rob Myers, developed a commercial media production model based around the Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike (CC-BY-SA) licence. The model was successfully deployed in 2007 as *Where are the Joneses?*, a marketing project for Ford of Europe commissioned by Imagination and realised by TV production company Baby Cow.

Where Are The Joneses? is, from one perspective, a cult situation comedy featuring two characters searching Europe for their siblings. It is a collection of 90 short films, each between two and seven minutes long, which were produced and published direct to the web by a five-person production team that toured Europe during summer 2007. There was no centralised website for the content. Instead Bausola used multiple channels, including a blog, wiki, Facebook group, Flickr photoset, collection of YouTube videos and a Twitter stream.

Users were invited to engage through these channels directly with the production team and could:

- Influence where the Joneses go next
- Influence the plot and the dialogue
- Appear in the series
- Remix the videos and re-upload to YouTube
- Make soundtracks for the Joneses
- Make animations of the Joneses
- Do anything else they can think of

This latter invitation, which called on the audience to express their own creativity, treated them as active participants rather than passive consumers. Scripts were written in collaboration with a community of users. Submissions were handled by a team of three moderators who provided feedback to help develop ideas and then passed the polished suggestions onto the production team.

Everything created for *Where Are The Joneses?* was published under a flexible CC licence which permitted even commercial reuse to foster a new kind of two-way relationship between a brand and its public. The project embodied the shift from a broadcast to a conversational model by enabling “many-to-many” rather than “one-to-many” communication.

The decision to permit commercial exploitation allowed downstream users to incorporate *Where Are The Joneses?* source material in any project, whether for business or personal use. Counter-intuitively, this hasn't precluded the creative output of the project from generating income.

Unusually for marketing activity, the project was engineered to directly recover some of its costs: the budget Ford allocated was intended to become self-sustaining. Income is generated not from fees for licensing the copyright, but from charging to re-edit, add artwork and otherwise repurpose the footage and short films.

Ford also benefits by saving on expensive broadcast advertising slots because *Where Are The Joneses?* was distributed to its global fan-base online via the Internet Archive, which fed YouTube and standalone players like Miro. Although these platforms do not generate per-use royalties, the actors are contracted to receive standard fees if the materials are used for DVD and broadcast purposes.

David sees the technical barriers to realising the project as relatively light. *Where Are The Joneses?* involved very little bespoke work, and was largely carried out with widely available tools, such as Yahoo! Pipes, wikis and blogs, using the web as a platform to facilitate community participation and then distribute video output. Indeed, the most significant technical hurdles were faced by the production team as they travelled Europe for 90 days, filming everyday then editing and uploading video to the web from a laptop in the back of a car.

No project is risk-free and Ford's lawyers were concerned that someone would exploit the videos for negative publicity by producing something to deride the brand. This risk was mitigated firstly by Ford owning the domain name so that they could pull the plug if anything went wrong. If they had, anyone looking for the project would find some of the project's content scattered across the web, but without logos or links back to the brand itself.

Secondly, the most recent CC licences contain a clause that prohibits users of works from degrading the spirit of the project. This gave Ford a firm legal footing to restrain any defamatory use of the work. In reality, there was no need to take either action.

The project also had to overcome significant social barriers. David used a PR agency to secure press coverage of the project, yet many journalists were stumped by the complicated concept and failed to cover the project with any clarity. They found it difficult to understand the fuzzy, but important, concept that *Where are the Joneses?* means different things to different people.

Commercial practice also caused problems: Companies generally retain different agencies to manage the different aspects of public interaction — from print to TV to retail outlet - which can make cross-media projects very difficult as they require teams from multiple agencies to co-operate in unfamiliar ways.

The Joneses is a watershed project. It is a first in this context in terms of wholehearted, open public engagement by a multinational corporation. David feels that, despite having no firm expectations for how the project would run, they

“massively over-achieved”, not just in the amount of conversation the project engendered, but also the fact that the assets are to be picked up and reused by Ford for future promotion.

David would have liked to take the experiment further by supporting a larger community through providing more feedback on the submissions. He also would have liked to have created “micro-episodes”, producing 20-second snippets rather than the longer videos.

Brands need public engagement if they are to survive in a global market of ever-cheaper goods and services. The conversational, two-way dialogue at the core of this model represents a genuine effort in this direction.

Full case study

Background

People are beginning to understand what is possible by engaging publicly and openly, as opposed to saying “Here’s our great product – please, please buy this, please, please watch this, or we’ll all lose our jobs”. We’re interested in making services and facilitating conversations, not dominating. Conversations lead to business, which leads to ancillary conversations.

David Bausola¹ is a creative technologist. He currently runs the strategy for digital works at Imagination², a brand communications agency. Prior to this, David worked on new media platforms for Channel 4, specifically on social software and video projects such as 4Docs³. David also managed the first round of Creative Commons (CC) based projects for the broadcaster’s education department.

Together with Rob Myers⁴, David developed a commercial media production model with the CC Attribution-Sharealike⁵ (CC-BY-SA) licence at its heart. The model was successfully deployed in practice in 2007 as a marketing project for Ford of Europe, named *Where are the Joneses? (WRTJ)*. This transmedia⁶ (i.e. operating across different media) project is still unfolding both on- and offline and is inspiring a new mode of dialogue in cultural and corporate engagement.

WRTJ brings innovation to the increasingly stale advertising space. The public is encouraged to make contributions to the production through numerous online points of entry. The copyright in all the materials, from written-works to the many hours of polished video output, are gifted to the commons rather than restricted to the corporate rights holder. This means that all the material is, by design, available under open terms that permit reuse. In this way the project aims to foster a new kind of two-way relationship between a brand and its public. *WRTJ* embodies the shift from broadcast to a conversational model by enabling “many-to-many” rather than “one-to-many” communication. And there is scope for this marketing project to directly recover some of its costs, meaning the budget allocated by the brand could become self-sustaining, because downstream users

1 <http://zeroinfluence.wordpress.com/about-the-blogger/>

2 <http://www.imagination.com/> An independent brand communication agency founded in 1966 that now operates 11 offices worldwide

3 <http://www.channel4.com/fourdocs/> “Watch, share, make documentaries”

4 <http://www.robmyers.org/weblog/>

5 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

6 David attributes this concept to Faris Yakob of Naked Communications. See <http://www.nakedcomms.com/> and <http://farisyakob.typepad.com>

will pay to repurpose the material for their own ends.

What is The Joneses?

To appreciate why this project is special requires an explanation of its many faces. *WRTJ* is from one perspective a cult situation comedy, featuring two characters searching Europe for their siblings. *WRTJ* was also a marketing campaign for Ford of Europe⁷, commissioned by Imagination and realised by Baby Cow⁸, the TV production company behind *The Mighty Boosh*⁹ and *Alan Partridge*¹⁰.

From another perspective, *WRTJ* was a blog¹¹, wiki¹², Facebook group¹³, Flickr photoset¹⁴, collection of YouTube videos¹⁵ and Twitter¹⁶ feed. Each of these web services was an entry point to the project, which facilitated the community's engagement with the production team. Users were invited to get involved in a variety of ways:

- Influence where the Joneses go next
- Influence the plot and the dialogue
- Appear in the series
- Remix the videos and re-upload to YouTube
- Make soundtracks for the Joneses
- Make animations of the Joneses
- Anything else you can think of!¹⁷

The last suggestion is particularly telling; it invites the public to involve their creativity, treating the audience as active participants rather than passive consumers. For David, the project's essence is a media cloud, which uses the web as a platform. He describes it as follows:

There's no centralised website, no centralised place for the content. It has numerous entrance points towards what is best described as the content, the editorial. In a nutshell, the project is a mechanism for the audience to submit script ideas, character definitions and general direction towards a situation comedy.

7 http://www.ford.co.uk/ns7/home/-/rt_home/-/-/-/

8 <http://www.babycow.co.uk/>

9 <http://themightyboosh.com/>

10 <http://www.alan-partridge.co.uk/>

11 <http://wherearethejoneses.com/>

12 <http://wherearethejoneses.wikidot.com/>

13 Unavailable at time of writing

14 <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wherearethejoneses/>

15 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruvio0nEYvg>

16 <http://twitter.com/WRTJ>

17 <http://youtube.com/wherearethejoneses>

WRTJ is also a collection of 90 short films, each between two and seven minutes long. The shorts were produced and published direct to the web by a five-person production¹⁸ team that toured Europe across summer 2007. The production team posted their videos around mid-afternoon every day for 90 days. Scripts were written in collaboration with a community of users who contributed through the various web services. These submissions were handled by a team of three moderators, who provided feedback to help develop ideas and then passed the polished suggestions onto the production team.

The Joneses is free culture

A perspective that roots these competing descriptions is free culture, which is a global grassroots movement that defines its output as “works or expressions, which can be freely studied, applied, copied and/or modified, by anyone, for any purpose.”¹⁹ Free culture has established informal groupings in many countries around the world and is generally associated with enthusiasts of creative use of digital networks. One of the movement’s central tenets is that “the easier it is to re-use and derive works, the richer our cultures become”.

David and Rob’s concept, in conjunction with the CC-BY-SA licence and some open-minded people at Ford, ensure the project would be realised as free culture:

The audience contributes their ideas through a CC-BY-SA licence, which means they are openly sharing with the world, the Internet and Ford, their ideas for a storyline that the brand initiated. Those ideas are picked up by Ford, Baby Cow and Imagination to help craft a daily, five-minute video entry. Ford honour this licence by reissuing the videos under that licence, meaning that all the content on the sites is free for anyone to use and commercially exploit, as much as the production that we made for Ford.

Note that the decision to permit commercial exploitation allows downstream users to incorporate *WRTJ*’s contents as source material, whether that project is for business or personal use. Note also that Ford can still expect income from subsequent reuse, not from fees for licensing the copyright but from charging to re-edit and otherwise repurpose the footage and short films. This keeps the project free to hobbyists and other amateurs but also means Ford can directly recover some of their investment costs.

Getting paid with free culture

18 The team consisted of two actors, a director / cameraman, a project manager and an assistant producer. They initially planned to shoot for a year. The team were exhausted – but elated – after three months.

19 <http://freedomdefined.org/Definition>

Free culture status does not, as the name might suggest, mean that all contributions were made free of charge. The initial financial investment came from the brand partner, Ford, which covered Baby Cow and Imagination's fees. So all the professional contributors for *WRTJ* earned their usual wages rather than giving their time for free. Similarly, the actors, support crew and all the other backroom staff were paid standard rates for their work whilst the sitcom was in production.

This in itself was a major achievement. David and Imagination had a tough job convincing Ford to invest the significant budget to produce *WRTJ*. Grounding the production so firmly in public participation and licensing the output under CC made this job even harder, given these two elements typically deter even the boldest brand managers. Something that encouraged Ford was the potential for making a return on their investment. The model allows all the content to remain free and open, under the terms of the CC licence, and for the brand to recover some of their outlay.

Reuse, both commercial and otherwise, is precisely what the project's architects intended to result. For example, there is interest in licensing the project for distribution as a DVD. Under the terms of the CC licence, all of the project's content can be reused for free without restriction, whether the user is a global broadcaster, hobbyist filmmaker or anyone in between. This includes the compressed (low quality) videos hosted online as well as the uncompressed (high quality) versions, all of which are available for free on request:

Ford owns the rights to the video renders and will offer them free for anyone who wants to make a commercial use. When people are charged for a DVD or TV use, they are charged for artwork and repurposing.

Anyone is permitted to reuse all the project's material. However, the shorts are of no commercial use in the raw format, without further work:

What they really needed was episodes cut into 30-minute versions. Nobody wants to watch a DVD split down into two minutes clips; it would be painful. So the material needs repurposing.

Which Baby Cow was very willing to do, charging standard commercial rates and sharing their profits with Ford. Another benefit for the brand is avoiding fees for expensive broadcast advertising slots. *WRTJ* was distributed through Internet video channels via Internet Archive²⁰, which fed YouTube and standalone players like Miro²¹. As is generally the case for advertising projects, this exposure will not directly generate revenue for Ford and the project team, yet the public exposure and associated conversations indirectly create business opportunities.

20 <http://www.archive.org/index.php>

21 <http://www.getmiro.com/>

In David's words:

If marketing spend becomes zero and sustainable and the product is entertaining and cultural rather than a sales device, which in turn deepens the appreciation of what Ford thinks a car is, then its all good!

This also generated additional income for the actors and directors, who do not receive per-screening royalties for their appearances on the various internet video channels, but can expect payments from other commercial use:

Once the videos go onto standalone platforms, such as TV, DVDs, royalties are paid back to actors and directors under standard PACT²² / OFCOM²³ rules.

And the financial opportunities do not end there. David is ambitious to pursue all commercial avenues for *WATJ*:

Ideally, we'll show a 7-hour, epic comedy, with all episodes back-to-back in a cinema! We always thought it would be nice to get this into shop-shelves as a DVD or on TV. There is also interest in distributing 13 half-hour episodes, which we could see in spring next year. Whether it moves onto TV depends on appetite for DVDs, which will be a lovely and unique product because we'll enhance it with out-takes and the like.

What is the motivation for WRTJ?

The big shift in marketing is realising that the audience are in control of the brands. To make this user experience audience-centric, you put all the tools in the hands of the audience and indeed the licence agreement for how they wish to participate and share.

The motivation for this model requires, as did the parameters of the model itself, a nuanced explanation of the interests of the various project partners. For the brand-partner, Ford, there is the motivation of selling higher volumes of cars to a more involved public. For the creative agency, Imagination, the motivation is communicating the passion and products of their clients to the public. In turn, generating high quality output and other editorial content is the motivation for Baby Cow, the production company. Beyond these fairly standard incentives, this non-standard project also brings special interests.

For example, there is also the motivation of trying something new and different in an increasingly stagnant market. David commented, "most people don't watch

22 <http://www.pact.co.uk/> Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (Trade association in the UK representing independent television, feature film, animation and new media)

23 <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/> Office of Communications

advertise.” Because people now have far better 'PR literacy' than in previous generations, they understand the grammar of marketing and are harder to impress. PR agencies and their clients must innovate. This dissatisfaction extends, for David, to broadcast media in general:

The percentage [of programmes] that reaches the public through broadcast channels is a tiny percentage of what's actually made and developed. The standard approach of US networks (e.g. Friends, Lost, Larry David) involves a large committee of writers, who go through several iterations in private before the audience get to see it. That's an expensive way to make things, especially when involving the audience gives something more exciting. This traditional model is the ivory tower, but we're developing architectures of engagement.

In this context, *WRTJ* pushes all the right buttons. It engages with, as Dan Gillmor puts it, "the people formerly known as the audience", who are excited about being able to use their preferred Web 2.0 tools and services to interact with the project's. Perhaps more influential in the longer term, the editorial is open for remix. The possibilities here are, pretty much, endless. Users can re-edit the videos to show only their favourite jokes or characters, or incorporate the characters into their own plots and make new films. And this creative opportunity is given without the need to negotiate via expensive lawyers.

Following on, the motivation for the public to engage with *WRTJ* is to become part of a culture that is closer to and indeed generated by their input, rather than produced entirely for public consumption by professionals. Collaborators are invited to work with leading-edge technicians and writers who are genuinely interested in and excited by their suggestions for the show. Collaboration is also one way to encourage loyalty. As David remarked:

People talk about Web 2.0 being about 'we rather than I'. That's not true. The motivation for people to do anything to participate in any community is to extrapolate more value for themselves by working with a community. So offering opportunities for incentivisation, in a creative way, is the only way to encourage engagement and dialogue.

David's own motivation for the project is a blend of artistic persuasion and commercial sense. He wants the public and cultural producers alike to realise that culture and art are best seen as information flows:

This means that you can take it, download it and use on a standalone platform like TV or DVDs - as much as remix it online - there are no commercial restrictions to what we're doing. And that's the difference between marketing and broadcasting. How else can we spread messages unless they're commercially open?

Choice of licence

The standard 'all rights reserved' approach to commercial production, as David commented, would have hindered the cultural and marketing aims of this project:

As a marketing activity that's looking to engage in culture, we had to be sure that the engagement and media could spread without any commercial restrictions. The content is actually the engagement between the audience talking amongst themselves: the media is not the centre of attention. If we had gone down the broadcast route, dealing with production companies under the terms of PACT and OFCOM, there would be various rights for every time a video gets played or appears on a platform or channel. Stopping and starting every time someone wants to use a piece of media doesn't help a brand market itself.

An open licence was therefore sought to fulfil the project's aims. The team could have drafted their own licence or used any of a growing number of licences that support open practice. Their decision to use a CC²⁴ licence tapped the project direct into an expanding global culture of creativity, participation and reuse, which was founded five years ago by a group of legal scholars in the US. The suite of CC licences has now been successfully ported to 44 jurisdictions, with another 18 in the pipeline.

Although lawyers have redrafted the licence twice for UK jurisdictions, *WRTJ* opted for the generic version. Why?

"We only use CC-BY-SA generic, not the UK specific version. The blog is hosted in San Francisco, but co-located across the States; YouTube is co-located across the States; the wiki is co-hosted in Germany and Poland. The only way to use these distributed services and keep it uniform is to use the generic version."

The CC generic licences are jurisdiction-agnostic and designed for the kind of global project facilitated by the Internet's supra-national infrastructure. The generic licences are based on American legislation but do not specify any particular jurisdiction's laws or contain choice-of-law provisions. Although they remain untested in many jurisdictions, they are drafted to align with every legal system so there is no reason to believe they will fail in court.

Technical barriers

David sees the technical barriers to realising the project as relatively light, which

24 "Creative Commons provides free tools that let authors, scientists, artists, and educators easily mark their creative work with the freedoms they want it to carry."
<http://creativecommons.org/>

is encouraging news for brands and production companies interested to try the open approach. *WRTJ* involved a very small amount of actual coding and was largely carried out with widely available, “domestic” tools:

As far as programming web-services goes, we simply did two style sheets²⁵. There was no other coding. We used Yahoo Pipes²⁶ to do a certain amount of RSS²⁷ flow between the wiki and the blog, to synchronise the systems together. These are pretty much domestic tools. We re-skinned the blog and made it accessible²⁸, which pretty much any barely tech person can do. We used CSS²⁹ on the wiki, we bought a domain name and created lots of user accounts for lots of Web 2.0³⁰ services.

This view of the level of technical difficulty may be an oversimplification but the point to make is that *WRTJ* did not need teams and teams of developers to engineer a new software package or platform, which in turn every user must install before participating in the project. Instead the project team exploited a range of contemporary Internet services, using the web as a platform, to facilitate community participation and then distribute video output.

The risk that Ford’s brand would be damaged in the process of production did present additional technical challenges:

We did a lot of technology risk assessments beforehand, in terms of putting a brand project outside the control of Ford’s servers. What if something goes wrong? How can Ford do damage limitation? The trick that Ford came up with was to own the domain name, in that they can pull it if anything goes wrong.

The public connection between Ford and *WRTJ* was the website and logos hosted at www.wherearethejoneses.com. If, for whatever reason, Ford decided

25 “Web style sheets are a form of separation of presentation and content for web design in which the markup (i.e. HTML or XHTML) of a webpage contains the page’s semantic content and structure, but does not define its visual layout (style).”

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_sheet_\(web_development\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_sheet_(web_development))

26 “Pipes is a powerful composition tool to aggregate, manipulate, and mashup content from around the web.” <http://pipes.yahoo.com/pipes/>

27 “RSS ... is a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines or podcasts.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_\(file_format\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_(file_format))

28 “Accessibility is a general term used to describe the degree to which a product (e.g., device, service, environment) is accessible by as many people as possible... One meaning of accessibility specifically focuses on people with disabilities and their right of access to entities, often through use of assistive devices such as screen-reading web browsers or wheelchairs.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accessibility>

29 “Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) is a stylesheet language used to describe the presentation of a document written in a markup language.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cascading_Style_Sheets

30 See Tim O Reilly’s ‘What is Web 2.0’ for an explanation of this phrase and the principles and practices at the core of the contemporary Web.

they no longer wanted to be associated with the project then — because they owned and controlled the web domain — they could simply shut down the site. Then anyone looking for the project would find some of the project’s content scattered across the web, but without logos or links back to the brand itself. In practice, however, this failsafe mechanism was not used or needed.

The most significant technical restraints on the project were faced by the production team, as they travelled Europe for 90 days, “filming everyday, working on a laptop in the back of a car, editing, getting 3G³¹ web-systems stable. O2 provided our communications backbone, which was off-the-shelf.” Technologies are becoming less complex and more user friendly, whilst the skills to manipulate these systems are becoming widely available and less specialist, a trend set to continue as digital literacy becomes a key skill.

Convincing people to be open (social barriers)

In practice, as would be expected for something so unusual, the project had to overcome significant social barriers. As an effort to differentiate *WRTJ* from the mass of online activity, David and Imagination used a PR agency to secure press coverage on the implications of this innovative business model for the broadcast and marketing industries. Yet many journalists, stumped by the complicated concept, failed to cover the project with any clarity:

Every piece was slightly different and nobody was sure whether it was a website, a comedy product by Steve Coogan or an advert by Ford. *Campaign*³² got it right and *The Independent*³³ got it right too because they took time to understand it. The hard part is the spongy, foggy, cloud aspect that is hard to interpret but is the very centre: *Where are the Joneses* is whatever it means to you. One social barrier was finding a way to get people engaged.

Another, more ephemeral social barrier is that, for David, “its no longer possible to channel direct marketing. Adverts don’t work any more.” This is a fairly typically view, especially amongst the *No Logo*³⁴ generation who smell an advert at ten paces and resist any and all advances of marketing men. Moreover, the heavy-handed approach no longer works because the public can compare offers and switch suppliers much more easily in the digital era. Yet if the public don’t want to be sold things, how can brands encourage people to buy their products and services? David says that companies need to recognise that the public are

31 “3G is the third generation of mobile phone standards and technology.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3G>

32 <http://www.brandrepublic.com/News/766680/CAMPAIGN-Ford-last-laugh-web-based-sitcom/>

33 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/ahahaha-steve-coogan-on-making-tv-comedy-461392.html>

34 <http://www.naomiklein.org/no-logo>

more than just consumers:

I'm free to go [shop] where I want. If I don't want Ford or Nike I'll go elsewhere. If I want to explore a manufacturer or retailer then I'll do so and no one can stop that, not with the Internet.

'Consumer' has become a dirty word for David and others working in this innovative area, such as David Crowe of Xenophile Media³⁵. Brands must not seek to dominate or control their public, a shift in attitude that starts with the brand managers who are at the sharp end of disseminating corporate messages. For David, this process begins by keeping a human, member-of-the-public brain engaged at all times.

Commercial barriers

Commercial practice also presented significant barriers to the model. For example, brands retain different agencies to manage the different forms of public interaction – from print to TV to retail outlet - which can discourage transmedia efforts. It is extremely difficult to coordinate the many teams in many locations required for a project of this scale, especially when the teams are used to operating separately and ruling their own domains.

These difficulties were compounded by the project's various experiments with free. David comments:

It was hard to talk the client, technical and legal teams who kept saying that no one had done this before. But we knew copycat projects would spring up once it had been tried. For anyone to try this out would have been a surprise: it's the first hands-off, facilitating conversation effort.

Although the ideals of the free culture movement and the CC licences themselves have been around for a few years, this is a watershed project. It is a first in this context in terms of wholehearted, open public engagement by a multinational. Some are surprised by the apparently slow uptake of these ideas. But Ford, Imagination and Baby Cow grappled with the potential of this new mode of cultural and commercial production. David (and Rob) did much of the hard work convincing these parties to take a leap into the unknown:

Lawyers don't like giving rights away. Technologists don't like giving control for their services to other people. Managers don't like giving images away. But we used logic and sense, gave them models and diagrams, told them about how this stuff needs to flow in a particular way. We explained how social software works and what it is meant to do, as

35 <http://xenophile.ca/>

well as how web services talk to each other.

There is a common belief that convincing others, especially those in the traditional media business, to apply free culture's concepts and values is virtually impossible. Fortunately, David had a lot of experience and some real successes in this role from his many years at the broadcaster, Channel 4:

I have lots of experience explaining to strategists, rights owners, publishers, media producers about all the benefits of CC. And I've heard every possible objection. It's taken me four years to understand how to knock them back, but it will get easier as people see others being successful with it.

Risky business

After the hard task of convincing the world's biggest car manufacturer to experiment with free culture, Imagination had still to convince Ford there was no risk to the brand in terms of defamation. The brand's lawyers were extremely concerned that someone would exploit the videos for negative publicity by producing something to deride the brand. The defamation problem is, however, addressed in full by the latest iteration of the CC licence. Version 3 contains a clause that prohibits users of works from degrading the spirit of the project, which in this instance is a community comedy,

Ford would then be in a position to issue a cease and desist order to restrain further publication, as in the normal course of business. And that's an important point, which surprised and pleased the guys at the brand.

In practice there were no recorded efforts to use the content produced as part of *WRTJ* to defame the brand. Lawyers are naturally risk-averse, and often over-protect creative expression in an attempt to both minimise the chance of any tangential detriment, and to protect themselves from malpractice suits.

David made another interesting point on the new defamation clause, that, "its not promoted in any of the educational material about CC. Not a single CC video I've seen says that 'no one can tarnish your reputation'". In David's view, if the licences' developers put more effort into promoting this failsafe mechanism then more brands would be willing to experiment with open licences and free culture.

Evaluating the model

We just set out to try something, so we've massively over-achieved. It's hard to set an endpoint when a project turns itself over to the audience's wishes. We had no expectation for how the outputs would be seen in future or where the project's actors would work in future, and how that

would reflect back. We did not know that the assets would be picked up and reused by Ford in a future promotion.

This humble assessment of the project's initial aims and its practical achievements hides the years of thought and hard work that David invested in the model that underpins *WRTJ*. He doubts Ford's sales increased as a direct result of the project's successful execution, but is sure the amount of conversations around the brand increased as a result:

There wouldn't have been this much conversation around a TV advert, a poster campaign and possibly even a car, which says a lot about the impact we've had.

Another indicator of the project's success, in wider cultural terms, is that David's colleagues at Imagination are now talking with excitement about the potential for further application of web services in this context. Broadly, the implementation of the model was a success, "comedy was made, people were engaged, we didn't get shut down, there was plenty of circulation" But David knows there is room for improvement.

For example, they could have taken the experiment further by supporting a larger community through providing more feedback on the submissions. Similarly, they could have created "micro-episodes", producing 20-second snippets rather than the longer videos. And in keeping with one of his pet themes - cultural crossover - David would have liked greater interaction with other media personalities. For example, *WRTJ* received much interest from a well-known celebrity blogger³⁶ but they were unable to write him in.

DIY?

There is much scope for applying this model to other projects, for both producers and brands. David recommends that producers focus on giving good user experience, rather than producing what they think is quality product. For this model, a strong relationship with the community seems to be more important than production values. Also, producers should start small, with a small audience, and be entirely comfortable with the online tools they're using to engage with the community, whether that's Facebook, a blog, wiki or the next web service that grabs our collective attention.

Advising brands to work with the model is more complicated because, for David, every brand is different. Similar principles apply for brands as for producers, meaning try lots of little things rather than putting all your budget and efforts into a single expression. These smaller efforts are more likely to work for smaller outfits and less likely to scare those higher up the corporate hierarchy.

³⁶ <http://askaninja.com>

On the other hand, David is clear that the content of these projects should be freely available for re-use as assets in other projects and advises against the use of non-commercial licences in these projects: “No-one can remix and come up with anything new based on it so its a cul-de-sac, a passive experience and no great use to anyone.”

Where next for The Jones

Despite at first confusing the broadcast and advertising industry, because of its many radical features, there are signs this project will become a model for marketing and cultural production in the digital era. Brands need public engagement if they are to survive in a global market of ever-cheaper goods and services. The conversational, two-way dialogue at the core of this model represents a genuine effort in this direction.