

**Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund
Ontario Media Development Corporation
Telefilm Canada**

***CANADIAN NEW MEDIA
TOP TIP HOT LIST***

**Bell Fund Producers and Broadcasters
OMDC Executive Forum and Peer to Leader program participants**

March 18, 2002

***Executive Forum and Peer to Leader are graciously sponsored by Telefilm Canada.
Special thanks to Snap Media for generously donating their space for the reception.***

The Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund and the Ontario Media Development Corporation are pleased to offer this resource of top tips for success for the new media producer. In addition to our tips, you will find many valuable insights from the participants at the Top Tips Reception on March 18, 2002.

BELL BROADCAST AND NEW MEDIA FUND

What IS working?

1. Design/content:

- Content and design are generally very good, with some sites exceptional.
- The involvement of series writers on the website and new media writers on the broadcast programming enhanced the content.
- Original content and input from the creators of the TV show is important.
- The more appealing the layout and tone of the pages, the more time is spent on them.
- Contests, quizzes and games are the most visited pages – probably due to the high level of interactivity.

2. Technology:

- Navigation, information architecture and technology are becoming standardized. There is good depth to the technical expertise among new media producers.
- Difficult navigation makes or breaks the site. Simple decision trees worked best.
- The top navigation bar system tends to give the best results.

3. Promotion:

- Broadcast ratings are the most significant drivers of website traffic.
- Broadcaster support and cooperation is crucial to the success of the new media component.
- Email promotion and e-zines are strong promotional tools for the television program.
- While URL's on credits are useful, URL's accompanied by voice-overs have stronger impact. Reference to the URL's throughout the actual television program by on-air characters have an even stronger influence on driving viewers to the website.
- Sites hosted on broadcaster portals can benefit from the promotion budgets and branding experience of the broadcaster.
- Producers should budget for the purchase of on-air advertising for their new media projects.

4. Traffic:

- Website traffic generally correlates to the scheduling of television programming, peaking immediately after the television broadcast – although children may be deferring their web playtime to weekends.
- On-going maintenance and updating of the website is crucial.
- Licensing of web content to international broadcasters is a viable and valuable component of the 'franchise'.

5. Partnerships:

- New media and television creative teams who work together from inception of the project are creating very original, user-friendly content.
- Broadcasters can contribute to new media production particularly if they are involved from the early stages of development.
- Broadcasters need arguments "that make sense" to encourage them to support online content.

(Tips from a Project Review of a random sampling of recently funded New Media projects and industry discussions)

What ISN'T working?

1. Design/content:

- One-off value is limited unless the community is built beforehand.
- User uploaded content is not popular.
- Long video clips are not worth it. There is a lot of variance in the quality of video streaming.
- Site maintenance is weak after launch.
- Some sites have too much "stuff".
- Focus group testing feedback is very valuable.

2. Technology:

- Site maps and search functions are not always found.

3. Promotion:

- Marketing and promotion is generally very weak.
- Selecting the appropriate URL and determining where a website is to be hosted (i.e. on the broadcaster portal, or other) is an issue for all.
- Sites which are hosted on broadcaster portals can be hard to find, links are broken.
- Most sites have very poor search engine responses.
- Descriptive meta tags are under used.
- Regardless of what the URL is, there is general frustration in getting broadcasters to promote URL's.

4. Traffic:

- There is a need for a standard form for traffic reporting (e.g. Webtrends data).
- Restrictive legal policies and cumbersome registration procedures lead to low traffic.
- Traffic numbers are still generally small, but there is a clear correlation between search engine references and site popularity.
- It can take users up to three months to find sites, suggesting that sites be launched in advance of the television premiere.

5. Partnerships:

- Managing the web producer/television producer/broadcaster partnership is a consistent challenge.
- There is a need for boilerplate, standard legal documents such as co-production contracts, privacy and terms of use agreements, copyright disclaimers, children's privacy protection, etc.
- A fee-for-service industry is being developed in the new media industry with relatively little ownership by new media only producers.
- Financial models are unanimously the industry's biggest concern. How much value the web site adds to television programming needs to be measured.

(Tips from a Project Review of a random sampling of recently funded New Media projects and industry discussions)

ONTARIO MEDIA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

1. MuDiCu: Creating successful multilingual websites and econtent localization (www.mudicu.org)

Funded by the European Commission as part of the eContent programme, the MuDiCu (multilingual digital culture) project shows how culturally specific multimedia content can be adapted to the language chosen by the user. European survey respondents noted preferences in terms of colour, music, sound, navigational buttons, icons, symbols, backgrounds, still and moving images and spatial distribution. Results can be viewed by country or in the aggregate.

Demos (a day in Barcelona, London and Paris) incorporate survey preferences together with technological realities (e.g. low broadband penetration in Spain resulted in stills rather than streamed video in the Barcelona segment). This is Phase I of a multi-phase project. A must-see for producers creating localized content in Europe.

2. Market Reports from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (www.infoexport.gc.ca)

DFAIT's Canadian Trade Commissioner Service offers Canadians a selection of market overviews by country or sector at their password protected site. Users apply for a password at the site. Of specific interest to new media producers are the profiles from the Information and Communications Technologies industry sector, specifically the multimedia sector profiles.

These reports are extremely useful for targeting business opportunities outside of Canada. For example Denmark's multimedia sector profile states that the Danish government has allocated "approximately \$C65m to the Danish Ministry of Education to invest in new IT and digital media for the Danish primary/ secondary schooling system." Likewise, the UK profile noted, "The Prime Minister announced in December 2001, \$C112m of new funding for the provision of an online education scheme in British schools." Reports include statistical data and some reports list notable local companies with their contact information. Contact information for each regional trade commissioner is also listed on the report.

3. Ontario Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit (www.omdc.on.ca)

The *Ontario Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit (OIDMTC)* is a 20% refundable tax credit to Ontario-based Canadian and foreign-controlled corporations for products created in Ontario. Eligible expenditures include 100% of salaries and wages for employees, 50% of remuneration to freelancers, and a maximum of \$100,000 in marketing and distribution costs. The thoroughness and accuracy of supporting documents will affect the timeliness of the payment of the credit. Therefore, it is important to have well-kept records that itemize costs for employees separately from freelancers for the 24 month period before the product is completed and that detail costs for marketing and distribution in the 24 month period before completion and the 12 month period after completion.

TOP TIPS RECEPTION

Here is a summary of the tips collected from attendees at the TOP TIPS RECEPTION on March 18, 2002

Tip 1:

- People Don't Read
(Tips learned while working at The Ontario Science Centre – the first interactive science museum.)

People don't read. They don't. As much as we don't want to believe it, it's true. People just don't read.

So – in short:

- don't make it hard to find the information
- say it quickly and clearly - before the user leaves
- communicate to your audience at a level suitable to them
- offer a variety of experiences, if possible

Backstory - Here are the results of a very unscientific survey, compiled after years of watching people interact with the exhibits at the Science Centre, and sometimes by accosting them as they left.

- 7-10 percent of visitors interacted with an exhibit all the way through to its end.
- About half pressed a red button or two, watched a few things move, and then walked away satisfied.
- Some walked away because the exhibit took too long to start and so they thought it was broken.
- A handful, mostly the elderly who were not comfortable with technology, were too intimidated to even try an exhibit. Just staring and admiring from afar was good enough for them.
- And very, very few read the copy that accompanied an exhibit.
- Knowing that people don't read makes designing science exhibits very difficult. How does one get the scientific principle across with as little text as possible? How do you make it compelling so that the visitor stays with the experiment all the way through?
- There are probably many ways to enhance a visitor's experience to a museum, just as there are to a web site, CD ROM, game or other interactive medium. Just remember – try not to count on the visitor reading everything you've written. And if you want them to – don't make it any more difficult than it has to be.
- While the job of making content on interactive media compelling is tricky, remember that even though visitors to the OSC did not always read the exhibits, stick with them until the end, or even try them - the Ontario Science Centre has always rated as one of the top tourist attractions and experiences the city has to offer. Go figure.

Tip 2:

- As a producer that has to be able to make attractive, complex presentations on the fly that can instantly be distributed on the web/cd/or alternative methods, take time to find out about broadcast multimedia authoring software through SCALA to save your life many times over.

Tip 3:

- When feeling like a failure - always go back to your networking skills and they will restart your motivation bit by byte.

Tip 4:

- Continue to make a list of ways that you've learned to make your head think differently in crises of creativity.

Tip 5:

- Plan your web financing structure early and craft several different financial alternatives should one component (or more) of your financing fall through.

Tip 6:

- Talk to your fellow producers – share resources, war stories, funding and business opportunities. We are stronger together than apart.

Tip 7:

- Where business process meets back-end functionality, ensure that all business processes (lead generation, information requests, customer support) are fully documented and signed off by each business unit head.

Tip 8:

- In an economic downturn, clients cry even louder that they don't have money to "plan" a project – they want you to just do it. Avoid the just-in-time application development approach by employing rapid development cycles and stay away from marginal quality. Don't get caught in the client's agreement to trade off quality for price and speed. It will always come back to haunt you. Rapid development can be 5 simple steps: define it, build a prototype, test it, fix it, deploy it.

Tip 9:

- A problem well defined is a problem half solved.

Tip 10:

- To maximize your chances of realizing your web project that accompanies a television production, involve your broadcaster in your ideas as early as possible in the process. Our letters of support are much more real and compelling if we have more time than "the day before the deadline."

Tip 11:

- Be careful of messages given if a site doesn't support frames or flash. Most production computers are up to date with plug-ins so sometimes this can be overlooked! Also, besides telling people that their browser doesn't support frames, also include information about the site as search engines will often grab this information for site descriptions.

Tip 12:

- Partner with an educational partner - you will learn a lot, but be prepared, there are different ways of working.

Tip 13:

- Partner with established content teams - figure out your strengths and weaknesses in the partnership and most importantly figure out the rights first.

Tip 14:

- Talk to the funders before submitting your applications.

Tip 15:

- Outsourcing is good, but be prepared to spend more time managing the project.

Tip 16:

- Go to festivals, meetings and have a drink – get to know your industry colleagues.

Tip 17:

- Put as much money as you can into your projects as it will pay off.

Tip 18:

- Take time to be creative and make art. Not only does it make you feel good, exhibiting technology art is a fantastic way to drum up contacts and business. You will be surprised at all the people who will see your work in a gallery.

Tip 19:

- While attempting to maintain an edge vis a vis innovation, ensure you blend this with things that have worked well in the past for yourself and others. Too much 'cutting edge' can result in being 'cut out' from potential opportunities and reception.

Tip 20:

- Corporately, focus on a niche in the market and accomplish it exceptionally well. Don't try to do everything. Brand yourself and your product to fulfill specific and targeted opportunities.

Tip 21:

- Respect the market and your audience! Engage in a lot of market research to determine with more certainty what will work and what won't, from the user's perspective.

Tip 22:

- Keep working on the 'successful and sustainable' revenue model, no matter what odds you face or how difficult it seems to find. Eventually, with determination, luck and the right karma, it will come along – you want to be there when it comes!

Tip 23:

- Research. Research. Research.

Tip 24:

- Your offline successes make for easier online successes.

Tip 25:

- Involve sponsors and/or e-comm partners at the conception/inception stage.

Tip 26:

- International partnerships – cultivate them. They can take years to substantiate, but can offer large pay-offs. Best way – to attend international markets and conferences consistently.

Tip 27:

- Think fun. It is great if users find it useful. Better if it is useful and entertaining.

Tip 28:

- Marketing a new media firm means speaking the language of the decision makers buying the service.

Tip 29:

- Try to move beyond your 'tools' (eg. Flash, Dreamweaver, etc.) because otherwise you will always be constrained by them. Whenever possible, invent, develop, build your own tools, they will grow with you and pay for themselves in the long run, and your product will be unique.

Tip 30:

- Understand that the broadcaster is the ultimate client. If you structure the deal so that the site is a value add-on to the broadcast property – then both the TV producer and the web producer are serving the same client. The closer all three parties understand this relationship, the better the outcome.

Tip 31:

- Metatags are good. Make sure they're useful to searchers though.

Tip 32:

- Just because you CAN do something on a website, that doesn't mean you SHOULD. (3D spinning logos, cursors that follow you, big flash intros etc.)

Tip 33:

- Ultimately, behind it all, everything comes down to the writing. Good writing is worth the effort.

Tip 34:

- Systematic production systems: its creating a standard way of post producing images to be applied for new media environments. Basically be able to process in batch format.

Tip 35:

- Music is the hottest value add to a project. While licensing hit tunes can be difficult and pricey, there are a zillion indie bands that will license their tracks to help your project sing.

Tip 36:

- Leave lots of time for upfront planning and design.

Tip 37:

- Find innovative and creative partners to work with. It is important to ensure that each new new media project you get involved with pushes the envelope in terms of technology and creativity.

Tip 38:

- Convergence of TV/Web - Sprinkle clues from TV script of show into the activity which then bridges the two worlds. This will allow frequent viewers of the program to move faster within the activity and drive others to want to see the show to learn the answers.

Tip 39:

- Work with international broadcasters to create content that can be licensed internationally. To do this involves creating modular content, which can be housed on a broadcaster's site. The modular content can be customized and licensed to the broadcaster's needs, thus adding value, ie. through language customization the broadcaster benefits with increased traffic and the producer benefits by the creation of revenue.

Tip 40:

- To improve your websites' rankings in the search engines: use the title tags, use heading tags instead of font plus (+) sizes, do not use frames, optimize for keywords that lay people will use, not industry jargon.

Tip 41:

- We all want to build community, but we can't forget that communities include bad apples – whether it is budgeting for moderators or building in software protection or both its better to be prepared.

Tip 42:

- Feeling stressed about the tug-o-war between creativity and functionality? Get from our Toronto public library, the audiobook “The Creative Priority: Driving Innovative Business in the Real World,” by Jerry Hirshberg. While his stories centre around the design of new cars, you will clearly see that the insanity of creation exists on a much larger scale and with a lot more money at stake – and there is still no easy solution – except to embrace it.

Tip 43:

- Read the following:
 - “Game Design: The Art & Business of Creating Games” by Bob Bates, Prima Tech Publishing
 - “Swords & Circuitry: A Designer’s Guide to Computer Role-Playing Games” by Neal Hallford and Jana Hallford – Prima Tech Publishing
 - Gamasutra – The Art and Science of Making Games - www.gamasutra.com
 - Womengamers.com

Tip 44:

- “Know thyself....” No seriously, early integration of interactive strategies into convergent concepts. That’s the biggie for me!