

NEW PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES FOR EUROPEAN PUBLIC BROADCASTERS

Media technology is constantly changing. What are the challenges and possibilities? How can European public broadcasters keep up with these new developments and withstand increasing competition from commercial media suppliers and platforms? This was the focus of the discussions and presentations during this meeting. Some of the conclusions were sharing experiences between national and commercial broadcasters, keeping knowledge on new technologies within organisations up to date, and the need to develop new business models. Cinekid aims to make this an annual meeting during the festival to promote the exchange of ideas and the possibilities of co-production between broadcasters.

Generation Z

Nicoletta Iacobacci, head of Interactive Media EU, stated in her keynote speech that there are many different target groups. She also gave definitions of the difference between cross-media and trans-media, and gave examples of the first programmes dealing with interactivity.

In the formative years of television only a few channels were available and viewers watched what was available. Nowadays there are many different channels on TV, not to mention all the different platforms on the Internet. As a result target groups have changed dramatically, and the most important target group to keep in mind is Generation Z, now aged nine to twelve years old.

This is a generation with issues; they already have to face problems like global warming, climate issues and terrorism. They don't know a life without Internet and mobile phones. At a very early age Generation Z is already seen as small consumers, and they are not being treated as children. This generation is educated and grown up, while still so young. Generation Z is communicating online.

Offering diversity to Generation Z is very important says Marc Goodchild, head of Interactive and On-demand for BBC Children. The challenge for the public broadcaster is to create a safe environment for kids. But be careful, warns Marc, not to get a too soft and not hip enough image compared to the commercial competitors.

Frederik Hansen, DR, agrees. "Public broadcasters need to create a platform where generation Z can be secured and challenged. The broadcasters need to engage these kids by creating a friendly environment where parents, who are also very important in this process, can leave their kids without worrying they will be exposed to advertisements and unsafe content. For Frederik, parents are his strongest allies. The challenge for him in keeping the interest of generation Z is to keep on developing new formats and to do what nobody else is doing.

Overlapping definitions of interactive media

The terminology of the different interactive media overlaps, and it is difficult to identify the differences between them. According to Nicoletta's definition cross-media is presenting already existing content on different platforms. Trans-media is when you develop a story for exploitation on different platforms right from the start. This also influences the storytelling, because it allows the user to enter the story from different points. Each entry point needs a story that is complete but still connects with the complete story, while also adding something unique.

Early interactive programs

In the early fifties the first attempt to an interactive television show was broadcast on Ceefax on the BBC. It was called *Winky Dinky and You*. The programme was focussed on involving the viewers with the show, creating a solid relationship with the audience and holding on to them.

In 1998 Nintendo/Warner Bros initiated the world's first cross-media project: *Pokémon*. This was the first experience for children with content on different platforms. Nintendo/Warner Bros tried to engage the users in a whole concept. First a videogame was released, followed by many other things like a television show, items to collect etc. *Pokémon* created a "hype" among kids. They wanted to share their experiences and collections with their friends and classmates.

Good Practice

During the session delegates were given three examples of recent productions: *Draw Me a Story*, from the Spanish public broadcaster TVC, and two Endemol projects: *Ontbijtpiet* and *The Gap Year*.

- *Draw me a Story* initially started 8 years ago as a television show in Spain. It was presented at the meeting by Pere Arcas, head of the educational department at TVC. This Catalan project has won many international prizes and has produced a unique website with an online offer of over 100 tales from all over the world. These are told using the most diverse plastic art techniques and materials in order to stimulate the children's creativity, and the tools offered allow children to enjoy, either individually or collectively, the pleasure of building tales in their own way without limiting their imagination.

With this very interactive website children can get involved, challenged and motivated in their creativity. It asks a high level of participation, and the kids are in contact with others all over the world. They share their experiences through blogs and the educational level of the platform is high. The main target group is 5–9 years old, but the website is also used at universities as a practice tool for translators who are translating stories into different languages.

The website/programme has also been designed with teachers in mind, and it allows them to exchange experiences based on, or inspired by, the website. The results obtained can be considered extraordinary since they go far beyond reading, writing and plastic arts; the school activities stemming from the website are in themselves short stories about everyday life.

All the content used is internationally acceptable, and the aim is to go on expanding *Draw Me a Story*. This is a good example of a *transmedia* project.

Jeroen Dontje, Creative Strategist at Endemol Netherlands, shared his experiences regarding on two cross-media productions that were commercially funded and exploited.

- *Ontbijtpiet* is an example of a *360-degree cross-media project* created by Endemol Netherlands, the supermarket chain Super de Boer, and the commercial children's channel Nickelodeon. The supermarket chain saw the bad breakfast habits of children as a good reason to screen this show during the most attractive time for advertisers in the weeks before Sinterklaas, the Dutch equivalent to Christmas. Super de Boer commissioned Endemol to develop a plan. The following media were implemented into the campaign for *Ontbijtpiet*: a TV show (12 minutes daily for 3 weeks), a website, in-store promotion, a poster and viral video. The campaign is currently returning for the third year.

- *The Gap Year* was developed by Endemol UK. It is an example of a production only shown on Internet without the involvement of a broadcaster. It is a collaboration between Endemol and BEBO, a social network on Internet. It is made solely with advertising revenue.

A reality show, *The Gap Year* is about six young people aged eighteen who have just left school and have six months off to travel. The people in the social community of BEBO decide who will be on the show and where they will go. The content-based storytelling is created by the users and has proven to be very successful. Clips of the popular people in the show are now also taken outside of BEBO, and favourite clips are uploaded on You Tube or on Facebook pages.

Without any effort at marketing, the audience for this show continues to grow. Broadcasting in a social community provides a good possibility for users to react and interact with the content.

Learning point in this project is that a lot of editing and postproduction is still needed on the content provided by the participants.

Changes in audience approach, production development and organization

In the discussion that followed the presentations of best practice, firmly guided by moderator Lisbeth Mathiesen, some important issues for the near future were identified. Cross-media and trans-media strategy is of growing importance in both approaching the audience and in production development. Online content is the future.

You can no longer focus on TV alone because the young audience expects certain standards; good content has to be available at every moment. The media producers of the future need to think in 360 degrees, and the branding of a project is increasingly important. On cross-media projects setting out a good strategy for your "brand" and working together on all different platforms is a necessity. Every platform can help in making your "brand" more visible. You can use your TV programme as a marketing tool for all the activities online, and vice versa, to reach a bigger audience.

Nicoletta Iacobacci gave an example of how the Eurovision Song contest posted a clip on You Tube with the message that Eurovision TV would be making a special announcement on their website. After

5 minutes the clip was copied by someone and put on his/her own twitter account. Eurovision TV followed the route, and many people in many different social networks picked up the message. And when the announcement was made on the Eurovision TV website, the result was a 40% increase in visitors.

Suzanne Kunzeler, channel manager of children's programmes at the Dutch NPO public channel, explained that she uses a multi-media platform approach in generating and developing new projects. All the different departments (TV, internet, magazine) are invited to discuss the best platform for a new production. For instant a big hype can be created online to "seduce" viewers to watch the TV show.

The delegates saw the organization within European public broadcasting as one of the biggest challenges. Many public broadcasters work with long-term strategies and one-year budgets, and they do not have a transparent business model. This is a weakness in today's fast changing world, and employees in the same company, but from different departments, often don't even know each other. They work on, and only care about, their "own" projects and budgets. There is no synergy between different departments, making it difficult to create a good 360 project.

TV's Peter Arcas pointed out how fruitful it is to work from one creative team that initiates all projects and is responsible for one budget for all platforms. This model optimizes the process and collaboration between different departments. But Nils Stokke, head of NRK Super, also warned that you couldn't ensure a "360-degree approach" to all creative ideas. Not every idea is useful for a multi-media approach.

For most public broadcasters television remains the starting point. Hilla Stadtbäumer from WDR stated that the law in Germany doesn't allow her channel to premiere a project on Internet. This position is a weakness, looking at the new developments and expectations of viewers. More and more the younger audience prefers online instead of TV. They want to see content where and whenever they want, so content needs to be there all the time. Public broadcasters need to find a way to deal with this development so they don't loose their audience.

Jeroen Dontje thinks that TV will stay important at least for 10 to 15 more years, but after that it will change.

Jeff Gomez from Starlight Runner USA says in the future everybody will walk around with a mobile phone, which functions as well as a television and computer. Digital content is very important, and it's also important to be in touch with your social network all the time. Creating high quality content with digital items and animations is a must.

According to Maarten Siffels, KRO Netherlands, the law on public broadcasting is old and out of touch. It radically needs to change to keep up with future developments, audience demands and commercial competitors. For public broadcasters it is also important to involve embedded players like You Tube, Facebook and Hyves in their strategy because they are a strong marketing tool. However, the public broadcasters can't use this possibility since it is legally forbidden. By making content available at many locations, the audience is free to get access to it where and whenever they want. They can create "word of mouth". Nowadays a hype very often starts online, like Nicoletta earlier pointed out, and if restrictions like this are not changed, the future of public television is in danger.

The problem of keeping employees up to date on the latest technological developments in media also seemed to worry the delegates. How do you ensure that producers, writers and commissioning editors are up to date with the new possibilities emerging from new media, so that an efficient use of various media is made possible right from the start? If it appears that there is not enough knowledge within the company on a specific item, then there should be more flexibility to outsource parts of the development or production and hire companies or people who understand new technologies and how they work. Look at the qualities in-house and outsource the rest.

Marc Goodchild: "Project management is becoming a central skill in producing cross-media for public television. It is necessary to know how you can put a project together, and where to find the specialist companies with the necessary talent and knowledge."

Quality is still king

The strength of public broadcasters is that they are very experienced in creating high quality content. Creating good content for all different kinds of platforms can be helpful to interaction, and to maintaining the interest of the audience. Inge Kluff from Knetnet Belgium states that broadcasters are also very good in making high quality video and audio. For public broadcasters, mixing the strengths of good, high quality content and putting it all online makes it not only possible to keep up with commercial competitors. It may even provide a chance to get ahead of them.

Finding new business models

There are still not many examples of co-production of cross-media projects. This is a result of the lack in standardisation of new media. Marc Goodchild points out that it is very important to share experience and knowledge. This will create a chance to co-produce in the future when specifications are the same.

High quality projects for children from 3 till 7 years old are easier to co-produce than for kids from 8 till 12, states Frederik Hansen. Projects for younger children last longer because of the animation and the nature of the stories. Pre-school productions also involve less writing and less user generated content. In cross-media productions for older children the audience expects more locally produced items and a fast renewal of content. Therefore productions for kids aged 8 to 12 are less suitable for co-production. Co-production and exchange of ideas and knowledge could be further developed within the programmes of the EBU.

The legal restrictions on public broadcasters also imply restrictions in financing models for cross and trans-media projects with potential external commercial financiers.

TVC in Spain has recently been able to change their financing into a more commercial model. The government funds 50% and TV spots cover the other 50%. This allows TVC to work with commercial partners. However this will not be possible for most public broadcasters.

But there are possibilities in finding other forms of co-production or partnership, according to Marc Goodchild, who has experience in working with Endemol and other local companies. He prefers a commission rather than a revenue split and explains that if a project becomes "too successful" there will always be a discussion on its commercialization. Parents don't want their children to be exposed to commercial influence. The challenge for a public broadcaster like the BBC is to maintain communication and interaction with the young audience. Pere Arcas agrees: "We develop a format and after some time we give it away"

The use of external partners was discussed many times during the meeting. Most of the time cross-media production is handled in-house and technical, online parts of the production are outsourced to companies with lots of experience and knowledge. The public broadcasters are not very open in their approach to new ideas and projects from independent producers. The expectation of the meeting is that this will hardly change in the future. There are many restrictions in financing, and for a public broadcaster exposing content makes it very difficult to exploit the public programming on other platforms or in merchandizing.

According to Jeroen Dontje is Endemol developing a new strategy within which they are open to using ideas from independent producers.

Conclusions

To keep public broadcasters in the game, more attention needs to be invested in the following areas:

- **Reaching the audience.** Public broadcasters need to set out a good strategy and be available and visible on different platforms. TV is still number 1, but the young audience will increasingly use other media platforms to get the content they want, when they want it. Social Media will become increasingly important when building a brand from a production. The audience use media without paying attention to who is transmitting it. The task for public broadcasters will be to remain a reliable, safe provider of quality programmes and productions for the young audience. But to stay visible to Generation Z, public broadcasters need to focus more on operating online and thinking in 360 projects. They also need new financing and programming strategies. This is at the moment impossible because of legal and political restrictions. Involving European lawyers to change the law is very important. TV is still the nr. 1 platform for public broadcasters, but the need for exploration and use of other platforms will grow. By changing the law, public broadcasters will be more "free" to develop their projects and strategies.
- **Improving the expertise on new media and using existing in-house knowledge more effectively.** Employees in public broadcasting need to be given more opportunities to be educated on new technologies and to build new skills. One of the qualifications of public television is developing new formats with a high quality standard, both for television and for radio. One strategy could therefore be to focus on this expertise and outsource other aspects of the production. The use of new platforms and media technology needs a greater flexibility in combining internal expertise with external sources.

- **Changing existing organisation and business models.** Since they don't seem to work effectively for cross-media production, more synergy between different departments is needed, and / or a collaboration in creative departments with more flexibility in budgets so that one strategy and one budget can be used on many platforms.

Co-production projects are possible, especially for the youngest group (3-7 years old). New media for older age groups older than 8 need new local content all the time, and are therefore more difficult to co-produce. There is still a lack of standardisation of new media technology. This needs to change in the future.

A cross-media project involving TV, web, print and mobile platforms is not necessarily cross-media in a public broadcasters' perspective if their share of the "package" is just "yet another TV show". Even more so if the other platforms have a financing and/or payment model built so that a public broadcaster cannot be involved or associated with the platforms because of legal or value-related causes. That is probably one of the main reasons that most public service organisations in Europe develop cross-media projects in-house. This challenge is more addressed to private producers than to the broadcasters. But it can mean that good, partly commercial projects will be offered on a commissioning, license or revenue-split basis to the commercial broadcasters, which have more flexibility to combine content with different payment models. In other words public broadcasters might find themselves in a situation where the strongest projects developed by private producers are not offered or shown on public platforms, because a public broadcaster is not an attractive partner.

The restrictions in combining payment and financing models, thus creating larger budgets, also means that public broadcasters in smaller EU countries, who per se have smaller budgets (due to smaller national populations) will not necessarily be able to produce large scale and ambitious cross-media projects. That is unless - of course - they succeed in finding or co-developing cross-media projects in co-production with other public broadcasters. This again calls for a standardisation of technology; some degree of standardisation of media legislation (set by the highest bar) within the EU, and also possibly a restructuring of existing co-pro incentives such as the EBU. It might be fruitful if cross-media within the EBU was not treated as something additional to fiction, fact or entertainment - or as something specific to different target groups.

- **More exchange of knowledge and formats.** Within the existing networks of European public television, the EBU plays an important role in finding ways to cooperate in new media. A festival like Cinekid can help to facilitate meetings and co-production markets, but also provide training for public television's new media departments. The meeting noted the importance of contact between stations on a more regular basis. Co-production could be stimulated, especially in the case of productions for the youngest age group.