

# Facts in focus

CROSSOVER

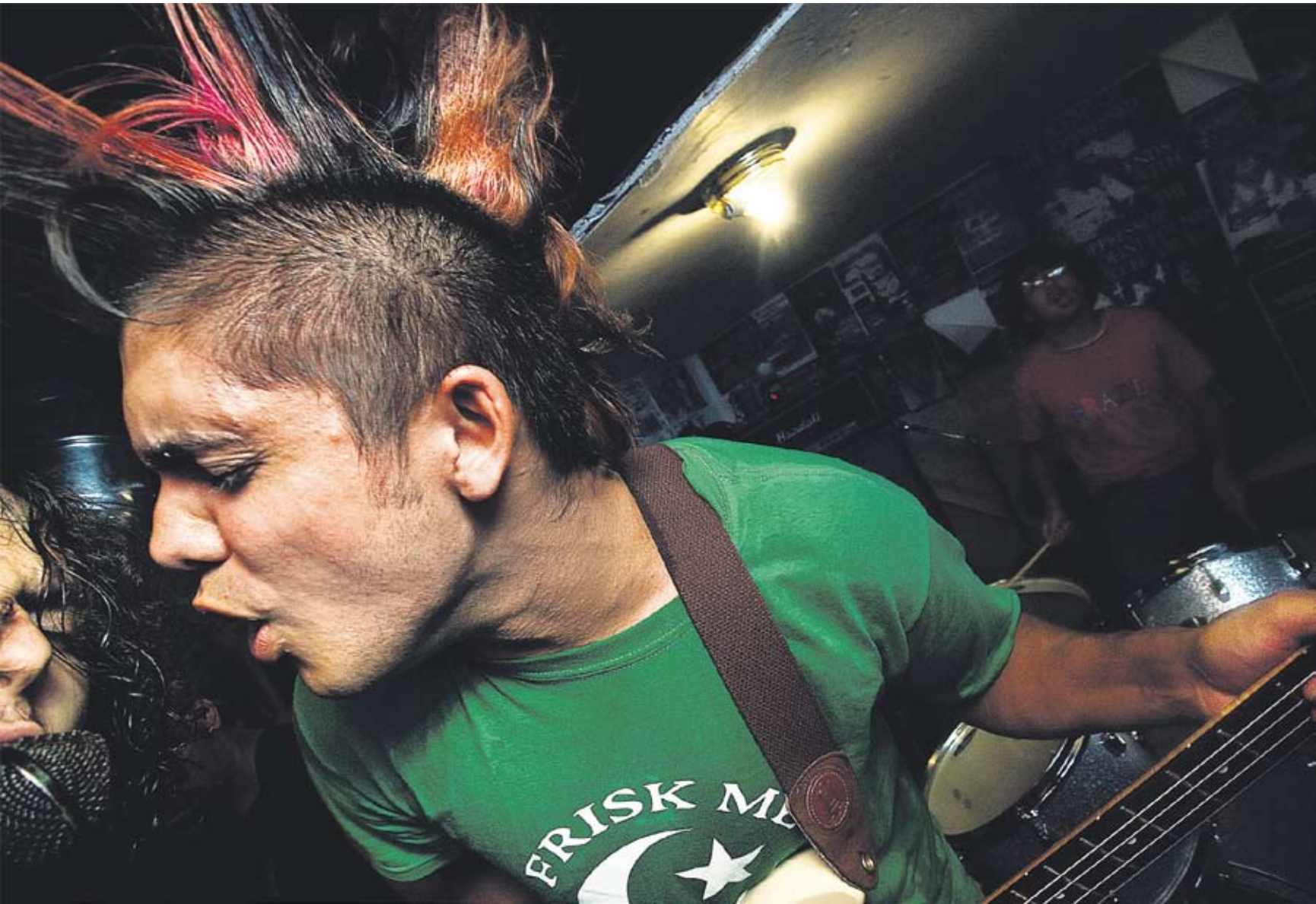


In association with Crossover Labs and Sheffield Doc/Fest

02.11.09 Media Guardian The way forward in documentary film-making and digital content

“There are plenty of good short films online and it is important to build up an audience there – it’s an incredibly exciting option to have viewers respond to you via the web”

Documentary film-maker Molly Dineen, *page 6*



Raw energy: Taqwacore, Majeed's documentary about the Muslim punk scene, is among the many projects spawned at Sheffield Doc/Fest's pitching market Kim Badawi/Redux

## Introduction

### A digital tomorrow

This special supplement is about documentary film and its future in the digital world in the week of the biggest UK documentary film festival, Sheffield Doc/Fest, which takes place in Sheffield on 4-8 November.

Documentary film is very much alive and well but, like all media, it is under pressure for funding. So our coverage includes a look at the growth of global co-productions, how new distribution techniques are bringing in more income and what initial steps some film-makers are taking to tap into funds from online sources. We also examine the MeetMarket, Sheffield Doc/Fest's specialised pitching market, where film-makers can make their case for funding to commissioners from around the world.

We explore the issue of the "campaigning documentary". This is where funding comes from interest groups, charities and non-governmental organisations looking to get a message out. Some of the new funding models are considered controversial but also necessary if the genre is to evolve in the digital age. We look at the trend of celebrity-fronted documentaries, a practice that is audience-grabbing but controversial among film-makers.

Another area tackled is digital piracy in documentary film as well as the evolution of copyright law to encourage creativity and yet also compensate film-makers. The trend toward creating multiplatform films continues apace and we look at efforts like the first-ever Crossover Summit at Sheffield Doc/Fest to promote film-makers working with games developers and others to make content interesting to the Facebook generation. Finally, we get some views on the future of documentary film audiences: what will they want from the genre going forward and how might it evolve?

## What's up, doc?

Documentary films have never been so popular, but tough times mean film-makers must embrace digital technologies to maintain the genre's upward trajectory. By **Kate Bulkley**

The documentary film is having a good year. Not only are there half a dozen documentaries doing well in the cinema but digital technology is lowering the costs of making films and allowing film-makers to tap new audiences on the internet. Michael Moore, Morgan Spurlock and Al Gore have put a different face on the worthy documentary, with their films becoming hugely popular. The same trend has happened on the small screen with Paul Merton, Terry Pratchett and Ross Kemp fronting documentaries on both difficult topics such as Alzheimer's through to the war in Afghanistan and travelogues.

The rising popularity of docs has opened up the wallets of new investors, from small, individual donations made online to large brands and interest groups eager to be involved in messages that resonate with the groups of people they want to target.

While budgets for television documentaries have shrunk, there are certainly more TV channels looking for programming and the internet has opened up a window to global audiences, offering the potential for far-reaching viral marketing campaigns and access to previously undreamed of methods of funding.

Heather Croall, director of Sheffield Doc/Fest, which is celebrating its 16th year this week, says: "There are currently five or six docs doing well in the cinema including The September Issue and Michael Moore's new film, Capitalism: A Love Story. Take it back 10 years and we didn't have one doc in a multiplex."

But the key to being a successful documentary maker goes beyond the high-profile successes of a few big cinematic hits. Croall calls documentary cinema hits the "tip of the iceberg". For the majority

of doc film-makers the money for making their documentaries still comes from TV commissions. And while the internet offers promotional power and global reach, there are also issues of piracy and how film-makers can get paid for their work.

"TV is still the core place where documentary makers make their money, and increasingly now it is understanding how to tap into international TV co-production budgets that is the key to being a successful documentary maker," says Croall.

To that end Sheffield Doc/Fest has moved beyond its roots of being simply a British documentary film festival to one that now attracts TV and film commissioners, producers, filmmakers and new media executives from around the globe all looking for the next big doc idea.

**New funding**

Sheffield Doc/Fest is both open to general audiences as well as those who work in the business. Four years ago the festival set up a pitching market called MeetMarket that now attracts about 1,500 film-makers and commissioners who meet to discuss projects and financing. The forum has borne fruit with Croall estimating that since 2008 some £9m of funding has been sparked at the annual get together alone.

Indeed, several projects sparked in prior MeetMarkets are coming to Sheffield this year as completed documentaries and will be screened at the festival, including Taqwacore - The Birth of Punk Islam directed by Omar Majeed, Men of the City, directed by Marc Isaacs and set in the current financial crisis exploring the human cost of life in the dog-eat-dog world of London's Square Mile and Kings of Pastry by DA Pennabaker and Chris Hegedus that chronicles a hopeful pastry chef in competition to win the coveted Meilleur Ouvrier of France award.

"What I love about Sheffield Doc/Fest is

it puts me in touch with the international documentary community," says Charlotte Moore, commissioning editor for documentaries at BBC Knowledge.

Moore says the BBC still fully-funds many of its documentaries; it has some 200 hours for docs across its four TV channels. But most film-makers believe that new money sources are also needed beyond TV. "I believe that TV is no longer the Holy Grail," says Andy Glynn, managing director of Mosaic Films. "It is being replaced by self-distribution, DVD sales and online. We are looking at advertiser funding, branded content, direct marketing and looking to charities and non-governmental organisations for funds. These models are all starting to work although the recession has hit them somewhat."

Mosaic is participating in a project exploring the potential of digital distribution funded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) and the Film Council called Take 12 that has been running for several months.

Beyond looking for new sources of funds is the issue of making attractive cross-platform content that works seamlessly with the documentary programme. "Most producers and broadcasters are not thinking about new media until the post-production phase," says Frank Boyd, director of Crossover Labs, a training organisation that helps producers create cross-platform content. "We try to help the different people involved in creating

The internet offers promotional power and global reach, but there are also issues of piracy and payment

content that works on different platforms to understand each other."

To that end, a Crossover Summit is being held at Sheffield Doc/Fest for the first time.

About 120 films will be screened at the Festival this year out of some 2,000 entries. Among these is Moving to Mars - A Million Miles from Burma, a feature-length documentary by UK director Mat Whitecross that will premiere and open the festival. The film follows two refugee families from Burma who move to Sheffield and it was financed by Channel 4/Britdoc, a foundation that underwrites new talent and new approaches to documentary film-making.

"Britdoc were fantastic," says Whitecross. "The advice we had was this film is going to be tricky to get financed because it's subtitled, it's niche and it doesn't have a potential mass market appeal but Britdoc said 'let's do it' the day we pitched it to them."

The passion that Whitecross and his producer Karen Katz had for the project won through (Whitecross's parents were political exiles from Argentina in the 1970s) and the result is a moving film that cost about £150,000 to make and has local appeal because the families were settled in Sheffield. "We weren't trying to convey a particular message because you can come unstuck if you do that," says Whitecross. "That said, there is so much anti-immigration rhetoric out there that you need to articulate some kind of antidote."

#### Weblinks

Crossover Labs: [crossoverlabs.org](http://crossoverlabs.org)  
Moving To Mars: [movingtomarsfilm.com](http://movingtomarsfilm.com)  
Nesta: [nesta.org.uk/film](http://nesta.org.uk/film)  
Sheffield Doc/Fest: [sheffdocfest.com](http://sheffdocfest.com)  
Taqwacore - The Birth of Punk: [taqwacore.com](http://taqwacore.com)

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# More is merrier for hard-pressed film-makers

In the current economic climate, documentary makers are adopting a piecemeal approach to funding

Tim Adler

A decade ago TV broadcasters would fund the documentaries they wanted on air. Now coming up with just a quarter of the budget is often the best they can do. Audience fragmentation and the recession have put pressure on TV budgets across all programme genres, but documentaries are especially under threat. They are neither broadly popular like reality shows nor strictly part of a broadcaster's public service obligations, says Peter Bazalgette, ex-creative director of the Endemol Group, creator of Big Brother, and currently an advisor to Sony Pictures UK.

Piecing together budgets from different funding sources, or finding co-producers, has become the norm for many documentary producers but it is time-consuming. UK broadcasters often don't want to co-produce because they want to retain control of the look and feel of the programme. "England and the UK don't embrace co-production in the same way as continental broadcasters," says Andy Glynn, MD of Mosaic Films. "UK broadcasters want control."

But co-production can work. Simon Chinn, producer of this year's Academy Award-winning documentary Man On Wire, made up his film's £1.2m budget from three sources: the BBC, Discovery Films in the US and the UK Film Council, each of which took on a third of the cost. John Smithson, chief creative director of Darlow Smithson, says that the trick with financing is to find projects with international appeal. Smithson produced Touching the Void, which became the most successful UK documentary ever because it tapped into a global audience.



Lifeline: co-production made Simon Chinn's Man On Wire a reality J-L Blondeau/Polaris

## Model format MeetMarket sessions prove invaluable

Now in its fourth year, the MeetMarket pitching sessions at Sheffield Doc/Fest have attracted a record number of 612 film-makers, all looking for the chance of one-on-one meetings and potential funding for their next big doc idea. In fact, only 61 survived the festival's selection process but those lucky enough to win a place will meet with a range of commissioning editors, distributors and other funding partners.

The MeetMarket selection and pitching format is now being copied by other festivals, supplanting the more traditional "beauty parade" where pitches are made in front of a large audience, which can be very intimidating. "Most film-makers don't like the idea of playing to a crowd," says MeetMarket head Charlie Phillips. "They want to talk in detail to one person at a time."

The sifting of the original applicants acts as a "filtering agent", he adds, so that "each meeting is set up with the highest chance of success."

For producer Sharron Ward, the MeetMarket worked well for her film, Addicted in Afghanistan. Ward had secured a couple of small grants to develop the project early on, but not enough to complete it. "Cold calling to commissioning editors was very tough and we did the usual rounds of Channel 4, More4 and BBC but they weren't interested," says Ward. "The whole online submission thing is also not perfect while getting grants from foundations can take forever."

After 14 meetings in just two days at last year's MeetMarket, Ward had significant funding from Danish TV network DRTV and strong indications from al Jazeera and - ironically - Channel 4 that they will buy it for their next year's schedules. "MeetMarket is a bit like speed dating, but it works," says Ward. "The DRTV money allowed us to finish the film and the other contacts we made should mean more funds once it premieres at this year's festival."

Freelance TV director Jason Massot had exactly zero funding before MeetMarket last year for his film called Switching Lanes, which chronicles the travails of an American family of seven who move from Alaska to Las Vegas to find a new life. He had gambled on the film's eventual success by spending three years and £35,000 of his own money. "Whenever I had some spare cash from my work on UK TV shows, I was off to the States to film," recalls Massot. "I got enough for a three-minute trailer which I took to the MeetMarket and that transformed the project."

After seeing his MeetMarket pitch, More 4 provided enough money for Massot to finish filming and complete post-production. The film-maker's relief was palpable. "This is my second personal project. My first doc sank like a stone in terms of people viewing it, there was only £10,000 to fund it, so I knew this one needed support." Switching Lanes will air on More 4's True Stories strand next year.

Ross Biddiscombe



Funding struggles: Sharron Ward's Addicted in Afghanistan

## CROSSOVER

Crossover is an international programme that provides the super-producers of tomorrow with the tools they need to equip them for production in a multi-platform media environment.

Crossover Labs bring together creative professionals from film and TV production, animation, games, theatre, web design and new media to share understanding of a rapidly changing mediascape, to form new interdisciplinary collaborations and generate ideas for projects.

### Crossover Summit: 4 November 2009

The inaugural Crossover Summit will address the new business of media and how production companies can respond to the creative and the commercial challenges of developing content and services for digital media. Held at Sheffield Doc/Fest in The Chapel from 10am, see page 30 for the programme details. The day closes with BBC X-Platform Networking event in The HUBS.

### Crossover Science: 22 - 27 November 2009

Crossover Science will explore the potential of digital media to make compelling experiences focused on the stories, discoveries, challenges and moral dilemmas emerging from science and scientific research in the 21st Century.

The Lab will comprise a blend of masterclass, presentations, workshop, screenings and play. It will bring creative professionals from diverse disciplines together with scientists to brainstorm, develop and prototype ideas for innovative projects.

### Crossover Business Support Programme: 13 -14 January 2010

This two-day Crossover business support lab is designed to help producers define new business models and help them take advantage of new opportunities in digital media.

Find out more about all upcoming Crossover events at <http://crossoverlabs.org/>

CROSSOVER LABS AND CROSSOVER SUMMIT supporters include:



### Crossover & Doc/Fest Cross-Platform Course for New TV Talent: November 2009 to May 2010

Newcomers to the industry will be given a chance to learn how to succeed as a producer in the world of Cross-Platform production for television in a course supported by Skillset's TV Freelance Fund. It starts here the Sheffield Doc/Fest, with its digital Crossover sessions and dynamic TV market, so take some time to encourage the youngsters who will form the backbone of the industry in the years to come. After the Doc/Fest, they will gain work experience with one of the UK's leading production companies, follow e-learning modules, learn how to generate ideas for new types of media, form an independent production unit, develop a project and pitch it for real to commissioners.



Produced by Doc/Fest

**'Do film makers really want to send viewers away from their finely-crafted film into the online world?' Meg Carter on multi-platform content, page 5**

# Time to rethink our approach to piracy?

Internet piracy may be a problem, but it is one from which film-makers can learn some useful lessons

Kate Bulkiy

For the 21st-century world of film-making, the internet is a double-edged sword. The web is a marketing bonanza where film-makers can generate a community of interest before a film is made. It allows them to circumvent traditional distribution methods; some even use the internet to raise funding.

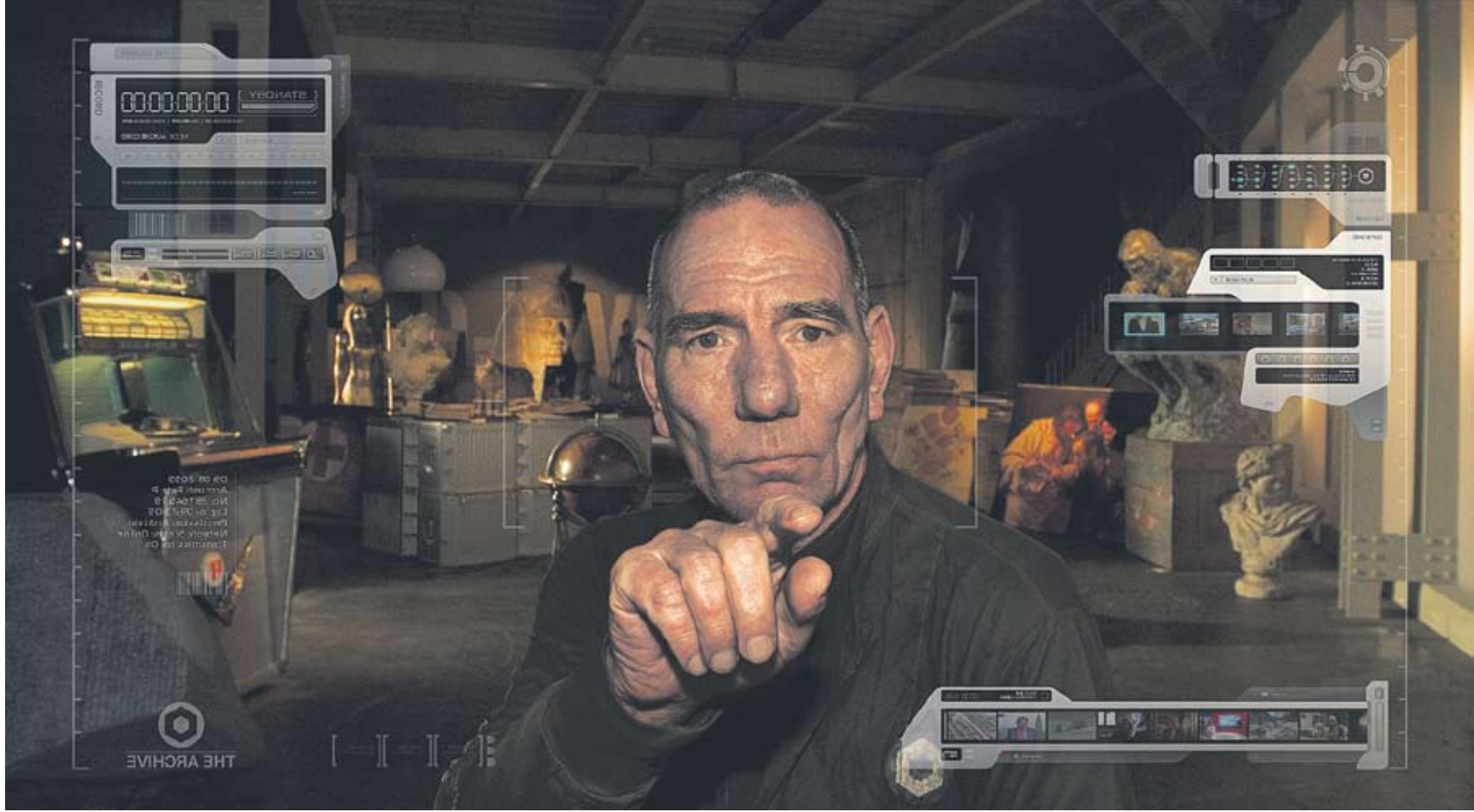
However, as the music industry has clearly shown, the downside of the internet is the ease of piracy. Major media companies are understandably concerned about massive revenue losses caused by pirates. High-profile lawsuits, such as Viacom's battle with YouTube, are being fought to preserve copyright. But even as some of the biggest media beasts pursue their legal rights, other trends are emerging. Companies like NBC Universal, Fox and Disney are also creating alternative, legal websites like Hulu.com to distribute their products, while other voices are calling for a complete re-think of copyright law.

But some documentary film-makers say there are things to learn from the pirates both in terms of relating to audiences and adding to their creative arsenal.

### 'Copy-wrong'

Witness The Age of Stupid, where director Franny Armstrong used the web to "crowd-fund" her drama-documentary-animation film, raising £450,000 from 223 individuals and groups who bought shares. The film stars Pete Postlethwaite as an archivist from the future who looks back and wonders why we didn't stop climate change when we had the chance. The funding model helped the film both gain traction with a global audience and keep its editorial integrity.

Peter Wintonick, a Canadian-based doc media producer, film-maker and critic with Necessary Illusions and Eye-SteelFilm, thinks that focusing on holding on to copyright is the wrong approach. "Of course there are international conventions on copyright, but they are generally 'copy-wrong'," says Wintonick in an email interview from South Korea. "Where would



Forward-thinking: Pete Postlethwaite in The Age of Stupid, a film that benefited from substantial online support Karen Robinson

**'Copyright is out of control. It is being manipulated for profit at everyone's expense. This is a global issue'**

culture be if we could not emulate the work of others? Where would the Bible be if monks didn't copy out the manuscripts by hand?"

The web-distributed documentary film, RIP: A Remix Manifesto, uses both the popularity of Girl Talk, a musician who uses digital sampling and mashup techniques, and an interview with leading law professor Lawrence Lessig, who has created a new copyright regime called Creative Commons, to show how US copyright law is stifling creativity. The film's maker, Brett Gaylor, says: "Copyright is out of control. It is being manipulated for profit at everyone's expense. This is a global issue."

However, Pat Aufderheide, professor and director of the Center for Social Media, School of Communication at American University in Washington DC, says that

outright piracy should not be confused with re-purposing content, which is allowed in many circumstances under "fair use" rules.

### Revolutionary days

"Whether we like it or not, we will continue to live with copyright. The policy is not broken enough for the major stakeholders to junk it. Therefore we need to understand what are all of our rights under copyright," says Aufderheide. "Creative Commons allows people who want to give away their work to do so. [But] most creators still like to hold on to some rights in their work. That desire will only increase among the vast number of people who can now create material digitally."

Developing business models that work online is the big question. But Aufderheide

and Wintonick are optimistic, both citing iTunes as a good online-selling model.

With several colleagues Wintonick has set up Docagora.org, which he describes as a "kind of public service and honest broker" to provide a set of free, open tools, data and information for documentary makers. "These are revolutionary days really, we are living in the fifth cinematic revolution," he says.

### Weblinks

Centre for Social Media:  
[centerforsocialmedia.org/fairuse](http://centerforsocialmedia.org/fairuse)  
Creative Commons: [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org)  
Docagora: [docagora.org](http://docagora.org)  
Lawrence Lessig: [lessig.org/blog](http://lessig.org/blog)  
RIP: A Remix Manifesto: [ripremix.com](http://ripremix.com)  
The Age of Stupid: [ageofstupid.net](http://ageofstupid.net)

## Walking a tightrope between funding and propaganda

Documentary makers who accept the backing of funding groups run the risk of having their editorial independence called into question

Ross Biddiscombe

There are few issues more sensitive for documentary makers than audiences questioning their editorial integrity, making the recent funding trend of matching up organisations like NGOs, charities and private foundations with film-makers one of the industry's hottest debates.

Will the funding group try to influence the direction or the message of the film? Will the film lose its credibility with the audience? Will taking funding from groups with a point of view like Greenpeace mean the resulting film is more propaganda piece than passionate story?

A Sunday Times review of the recently-released Vanishing Of The Bees summed up the dilemma. The reviewer liked the movie but said it was "let down by ... ablatant plug for its co-sponsor, the Co-op".

With such comments ringing in the ears of British doc makers, plus regulator Ofcom's tightening of the BBC's rules on documentary funding, Claire Fox, director of the Institute of Ideas, says that vigilance is needed to make sure documentary makers don't become propagandists. "It's fashionable talk for film-makers to go outside the broadcasting community for money, but there is a need to make sure where the impetus for the message of their film comes from," says Fox. "At the end of the day, NGOs and charities are political and their involvement in a documentary should not turn it into advertorial."

Fox admits that experienced doc makers have worked successfully with such partners for many years, but with less money coming from TV commissioning editors

there could be more danger of interference. "I have reservations about documentary makers being encouraged to find money from charities and other groups who have massive PR machines and who are campaigning for change themselves," she says.

James Erskine, executive producer on Vanishing Of The Bees, says the Co-op funding came via his distribution company after production was already in progress. "We had no direct relationship with the Co-op; we mentioned them in the film as a news story because they were one of the companies in the world banning products using pesticides. If I was a journalist, I could see how a comment about the sponsor might be interpreted because it's a fine line for campaigning docs. But no one had editorial control except the film-makers."

With competition for commissioning cash so intense, there is certainly a need for other funding sources, but the BBC currently blocks documentaries funded by special interest groups, although even the corporation's rules are in a state of flux.

For example, The Cove, a £3m (\$5m) campaigning doc about the slaughter of dolphins in Japan, was originally thought to break the BBC's funding code. But last month, when it was established that American new media billionaire Jim Clark provided the money for the film himself, the BBC began negotiations to screen it.

"I think it's OK that some film-makers pay their mortgages with money from NGOs," says Nick Fraser, series editor of the BBC Storyville strand. "But it means that film-makers have to prove their independence to their audience."

**Does taking funding from interested groups mean the resulting film is more propaganda than passionate story?**

## Self-releasing Why film-makers are increasingly meeting their own marketing costs



Self-release success: Christopher Nolan's first US film, Memento Memento/Pathe

Before he got to spend £122m (\$200m) of Warner Bros' money making his latest blockbuster, it's worth remembering that Batman director Christopher Nolan ended up having to market and distribute his first US film, Memento, pretty much by himself.

Self-releasing a film, which means paying for distribution and marketing yourself, is normally seen as a last resort.

But the traditional wisdom is breaking down and in particular for documentary films, says New York-based distribution expert Marian Kaltai-Levine. "The stigma of self-distribution doesn't exist anymore." She says that film-makers have to take control of their own destiny out of necessity and that releasing in cinemas helps boost a film's profile before it airs on television.

However, self-release is not cheap. In Britain, the average marketing campaign for a film costs £100,000. For a US release, the cost will be around a million dollars. Josh Newman, founder of Cyan Pictures, thinks film-makers need to raise one third again of what they've scraped together to make their documentary to give it a chance in movie theatres.

Film financiers, sensing the change, are putting together marketing funds. Cyan Pictures has raised £61m (\$100m) to pay for releases. Golden Sand Entertainment in Los Angeles has raised double that.

Releasing simultaneously in the cinema, on DVD and on television can give the biggest "bang for the buck" in publicity terms. Michael Winterbottom did this with The Road to Guantanamo. Andrew Eaton, the film's producer, says the cinema release just about covered its costs. "If you're creating something for a small, specialised audience, it's up to you to create that audience," he says.

Tim Adler



# Internet marketing training

17 November 2009

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### Facts in focus Multiplatform content

# Interactive strategies aim to grow audiences

Cross-platform documentary content has traditionally been an afterthought, but attitudes are changing

Meg Carter

The dearth of successful, multiplatform documentary programme content is largely because lower-risk projects eg. longer-running series and programmes aimed at teens, have so far been the areas targeted for multiplatform exploitation. But documentaries may be coming of age in this regard as commissioners and producers seek new ways to extend their audiences and production techniques. “One reason we’ve not seen more multiplatform documentaries is the economics of production,” says Adam Gee, cross-platform commissioning editor for factual programming at Channel 4. “You need a decent footprint in peak-time schedules to drive sufficient numbers online yet many documentaries nowadays are one-offs rather than full series.”

#### Audience benefit

Another factor is figuring out which bits of a documentary will work best on digital platforms. Nick Cohen, BBC multiplatform commissioning executive for factual and arts, says: “Multiplatform has to be about giving people something to do. But to work, you must think through carefully the audience benefit – a very different approach to traditional TV production.” Then there are the big cultural differences between TV and digital production. These pose perhaps the greatest challenge, says Frank Boyd, director of Crossover Labs, a cross-platform training initiative. “Lack of digital production expertise means many independent producers work with a digital agency to produce multiplatform content. But most production people are trained and experienced in a single medium, so one element of a project will always come first – usually TV.” Despite this, a number of recent successes demonstrate that lessons are now being learned. “Britain from Above was conceived as cross-platform from the outset – a critical factor in its success,” believes Kirsty Hunter, head of interactive for the show’s producer, Lion TV. The programme also benefited from being made by a fully integrated multiplatform production team drawn from Lion TV and digital agency Numiko. Numiko managing director David Eccles says: “The One Show was, in effect, an executive summary of what happened online and on BBC4. On BBC4 the audience was directed to extended content which explored topics only touched on by BBC1.” The Truth About Crime, a documentary conceived as a multiplatform idea by Films of Record and produced in association with Mentorn Media, demonstrated the



Colourful content: Embarrassing Bodies’ Doctor Christian Jessen warns teenage kids about sunburn in one of the Doctors in Magaluf road shows Channel 4

#### The Routes project A multiplatform success story

Channel 4’s goal of motivating a teen audience to learn more about genetics led to Routes, a cross-platform project with TV, online and offline elements. The project launched in January 2009 and was co-funded by the Wellcome Trust. Routes comprised three main strands, straddling online, the real world and TV, and was aimed at 14- to 19-year-olds. The first strand of the project, which was created by Oil Productions, was a series of short-form documentary programmes featuring comedian Katherine Ryan who suffers from lupus. The second strand was a package of short, genetics-themed online games and the third a murder mystery game built around the fate of a fictitious genetics scientist, Professor Markus Schoenberg. Clues were spread across 30 specially-created websites as well as a number of live events. The game element ran for three months culminating in an event involving

selected players and actors taking part in a raid on a fictitious genetics laboratory via social media networks. The “raid” was filmed and the result put online. “Although everything was moderated by the production team, the idea was to let things unfold organically,” Oil creative director Mike Bennett explains. “We hoped, by allowing ‘players’ to co-author certain elements, to create a truly immersive experience.” The Routes website, which remains available to view as an educational resource, has so far attracted unique visitors of just over half a million. “The key to making any multiplatform content work is for everyone, TV and digital producers, to work as a single team,” says Channel 4 Education commissioning editor Matt Locke. **MC**

**Weblink**  
Routes: routesgame.com/home

potential of online to make programme content more personally relevant to its audience, says the BBC’s Cohen. The BBC1 series was a linear documentary with traditional narrative. Online, however, all data behind the TV show was made available for the audience to play with. Despite the advantages of thinking multiplatform from the outset, successful content can also (and does) evolve organically – proof that clear rules and practices are yet to be established. For example, Embarrassing Bodies, produced by Maverick TV, was first commissioned as a post-watershed, TV-only documentary series back in 2000. In 2007 it was re-presented to Channel 4’s features department as a primetime, multiplatform show. “At first, the multiplatform content was designed as an educational add-on and just cross-promoted at the TV show’s end,” says Maverick founder and digital media director Jonnie Turpie. When the production team saw the spike in web traffic after the shows aired, the strategy was re-thought; by the second series, expert advice from doctors commissioned for online along with direct references to the multiplatform con-

tent were integrated throughout the TV show. As a result, 3.5 million people have accessed the website and mobile content, demonstrating the mainstream appetite for multiplatform. **Community of interest** Clear spikes in Embarrassing Bodies’ web traffic proved viewers will watch factual TV with laptops open at the same time, creating what Gee calls “a shift” at Channel 4. “It was the first evidence that multiplatform for factual could work and find an audience,” he says. Lion TV’s Hunter says there is scope for documentary-makers to integrate multiplatform into the TV production process itself. “The question is how far can you push multiplatform pre-broadcast to build a community of interest who will eventually be your audience – using blogs and tweets, for example?” Turpie sounds a note of caution, however. “Embarrassing Bodies showed that people multitask while watching factual programming, which raises a rather fundamental question: do documentary-makers really want to send viewers away from their finely-crafted film into the online world?”

## Gaming brings serious factual content to life

Documentary-linked games can put across serious factual content in an enjoyable, accessible manner. So why aren’t there more of them?

Meg Carter

In May 2009, Channel 4 launched 1066: The Game, to accompany its historical docu-drama series, 1066. The game allowed players to take control of English, Viking or Norman armies to learn more about military strategy and social issues of the time. Six months on, the game has been played 6.5m times – a clear indication of the potential interest in games involving documentary themes. Channel 4’s interest in games is driven by a belief that multiplatform content is the best way to fulfil its remit to provide educational programming for a 14- to 19-year-old audience. However, the lessons now being learned are set to shape the development of games for other audiences and different forms of factual content. “Games are very good for historical subjects with rich back stories,” Channel 4 Education commissioning editor Matt Locke explains. “But they are also a powerful way to address issues that might otherwise be regarded as dry or difficult.” A case in point is Smokescreen, a game

recently launched by Channel 4 about online privacy in which players experience the potential pitfalls of posting every thought and action online. It was developed by multiplatform production company Six to Start, whose co-founder Adrian Hon felt active audience participation was the best way to bring the content to life. “Games make a lot of sense in education because teens really like them,” Hon says. “But their potential extends way beyond this. Everyone plays games in some shape or form, even if it’s doing a crossword or Sudoku. It’s all down to finding the type of game most appropriate to the subject.” Games can also extend the potential audience for factual material. “A gaming component to a multiplatform content project can broaden the audience for a TV documentary, bringing in a new demographic or gender bias,” says games consultant Margaret Robertson. Robertson, who is a mentor at Crossover Labs, cites a number of examples, including The McDonalds Game, where

‘A gaming component to a multiplatform content project can broaden the audience for a TV documentary’



Life online: Channel 4’s game, Smokescreen, explores online privacy Channel 4

players learn first hand the challenges and compromises that might be required in managing to ethically run a branch of the fast food giant. Another example is September 12, a game which forces players to consider the collateral damage they cause when trying to wipe out terrorists threatening a community. Though both games were developed by games companies as free, stand-alone online games, their serious subject matter indicates the potential for film-makers. Yet few examples of documentary-linked games exist. Most TV-themed games development has so far been driven by drama and entertainment. Funding issues and lack of contact between games and TV producers are two reasons for this, Hon suggests. Another, however, is concern about appropriateness. “In a business where people’s careers are built on credibility, accuracy and not manipulating the facts, interactive content is still seen by many as scary – there is a stigma around games,” Robertson concedes. “But the counter-argument is that by playing around with the facts a user may end up understanding more about the wider context – an opportunity documentary-makers can’t ignore.”

#### Weblinks

1066: tinyurl.com/cv72px  
Smokescreen: smokescreengame.com



Facts in focus Celebrity/Personal views

# When the stars come out, so do the viewers

The success of the celebrity-driven documentary has earned the once-scorned genre a permanent place in the plans of TV schedulers

Ross Biddiscombe

The celebrity-led documentary or factual series might feel anathema to many traditional documentary film-makers, but the trend is here to stay because it works.

For commissioners like Richard Woolfe at Five, a familiar face leading a factual series helps it to stand out in a crowded TV schedule. “Celebrities like Paul Merton (Paul Merton in China for Five) or Rory McGrath (Rory and Paddy’s Great British Adventure for Five) are great story tellers and fantastic communicators who revel in passionate projects,” says Woolfe. “The viewer is hooked because the shows work on two levels - it’s about the host and their experiences together with a good dollop of jeopardy that makes for must-see, talk-about programming.”

Ross Kemp In Afghanistan, an award-winning series for Sky One, is a case in point. The former Eastenders TV star has also looked at gangs and, most recently, at modern pirates, all of which have attracted good audiences for Sky. “The Afghanistan series with Ross was a kind of journalism; there was no prescriptive idea, but the journalism comes through actuality,” says Andrew O’Connell, the programme’s executive producer. “It’s not the heavier style of Dispatches or Panorama. It’s not massively intellectual; it’s more visceral. It is journalism through great access and Ross asking great questions.”

Celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall went after Tesco in his Channel 4 documentary series, Chickens, Hugh & Tesco Too, making very watchable telly. Hugh’s



Question time: Ross Kemp’s dispatches from the Afghan frontline typify the trend towards star-driven documentaries Sky One

sharp point about battery-farm raised chickens arguably benefited from his passion about the subject and celebrity.

But for veteran doc maker Molly Dineen there is an unhealthy crossover between PR and news. In her opinion, celebrity documentaries do not help. “I think Joanna Lumley is wonderful and so are orangutans, but why should she go and tell us about them rather than a serious film-maker?” asks Dineen.

She believes that “celebrity influence” is one reason that new, original documentary ideas are so scarce. “Commissioning editors need to be braver. There is too much copying of versions of the same thing,” she says.

“The best documentaries are unpredictable,” adds Nick Fraser, series editor of the BBC’s Storyville strand. “With a celebrity involved they often will want to see the effect of their labours on screen and there is a tendency for them to want bite-sized social messages. Too many of this type of documentary would just be boring.”

Producer Rachel Wexler prefers her “celebrity” to be the documentary subject, as happened with real-life brain surgeon Henry Marsh in her highly-acclaimed The English Surgeon. “I don’t mind a celebrity who is credible within the subject - like Stephen Fry talking about a mental disease that affects him (as he did in BBC2’s Secret Life of the Manic Depressive) - because that can help viewers understand the subject better,” says Wexler. “But I dislike the idea of plonking a celebrity in a film just because they are famous.”

For some film-makers, the celebrity impact is used in a more subtle way. Producer Christopher Hurd used Ted Danson (star of Cheers and Three Men And A Baby) to narrate his campaigning documentary The End Of The Line because the star had been speaking out on the subject of fish depletion for many years. “Ted was well informed and was prepared to speak to the press which made a big difference, especially in America.”

Doc/Fest

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Debate

What will future audiences want and how will producers deliver it?

James Erskine, director and producer. Credits include: Vanishing Of the Bees (producer) and Torchwood (director)

There have been some very high impact films on environmental topics in the last year, but I’m not sure that the trend for this kind of campaigning movie will continue. Audiences don’t need to keep being told just what’s wrong. I think it’s more likely that more films on issues like human rights and social causes will be made allow people to look at the world through a more positive lens and inform them about how they can change things. We don’t want audiences leaving the cinema feeling depressed or hopeless all the time.

Also, the cinema is not a long-term forum for documentaries. Doc films for the cinema are too expensive to make and release for most film-makers. But we can still make docs about big issues. We’re making a film about arms spending and weapons of mass destruction, but we approach it with humour. Plus it’s time to look at these subjects in a more modular way; breaking them down into a 3-minute piece to send to a mobile phone. Younger audiences are more likely to watch this than a classic narrative.

Alice Carder, student journalist and film-maker

The documentary film-making business needs de-mystifying for the next generation; the industry can feel very closed and too London-centric. Studying in Sheffield, sometimes it feels like I’m working on my own. But there is such a lot of freedom to think that anyone can pick up a camera and start making films about what they see around them. Young adults of this generation are benefiting from the advances in technology and also in price. I use a £700 Sony handheld HD camera and that’s a good enough to make real documentaries. But you also need to be really multiskilled - operate the camera, edit film as well as promote yourself and get your own funding. It means the film-maker can have control. There should be more mentors in the industry, experienced people who can encourage us and give us guidance. Then young adults can make more docs about their own experiences and what they see around them.

Hear Matt Wells, Jeff Jarvis and panels of experts pick over the biggest media stories on both sides of the Atlantic

Media Talk and Media-Talk USA podcasts, guardian.co.uk/audio

Molly Dineen, documentary film-maker. Credits include: Home from the Hill, The Heart of the Angel, Tony Blair and Geri

We are going through a revolution in how we live and work with digital technology and it’s something every film-maker - including myself - has to embrace. There are plenty of good short films being shown online and it is important to build up an audience there because it’s an incredibly exciting option to have viewers respond to you via the web. For years, we have killed ourselves trying to get a story right and

Interviews by Ross Biddiscombe