

Immediated Autodocumentary is the Key to Your Next Social Media Strategy

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You've read the blogs and seen the videos¹ about the "social media revolution" and you use Twitter and Facebook, but you're still having difficulty understanding how social media will make a difference to your company's bottom line. Meanwhile, you've probably heard it's important to create "experiences" for your customers/audience, which seems to conflict with a vision of communications and marketing heading into the virtual and out of the physical. In this paper we'll look at how these trending views on marketing can not only reconcile their differences but engage in a highly efficient symbiosis.

In order to understand how to leverage these new web-based technologies – and how to tie them into the innovative realm of "experience" marketing – it is essential to have a clear understanding of the latest advances in digital video production and the impact these advances have on the budget, turnaround time and relevance of your next social media campaign. The primary technological catalysts we are concerned with are:

HARDWARE which allow the speed of video production to be nearly immediate, such as;

- Solid-state recording media (SD, Compact Flash, etc.)
- Miniaturized and portable high-fidelity audio recorders, HD video cameras, and digital video projectors
- Laptops which are capable of post-production and double as playback media when connected to digital video projectors
- Proliferation of consumer HD video cameras

SOFTWARE which encourages simultaneous self-reflection and sharing;

- Social Networks (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, etc.)
- Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Reddit, Digg, etc.)
- Blogs (Blogger, Wordpress, Tumblr, Posterous etc.)

This confluence of factors is giving rise to a new form of video production which we call *Immediated Autodocumentary*.

We'll break this term down into its constituent parts:

IMMEDIATED

immediate + mediated

Usually there is a significant delay between shooting and distributing a documentary which can span months or even years. Perhaps this delayed gratification experience is familiar to you; a well-organized video production documents your event, but the final cut comes months later after the glory of the experience has faded. The potential buzz which could have been created by a prompt mediation of the experience is squandered, and the resulting video is added to the growing company archive.

Immediated content is more relevant to an event's participants because they can access it in some form during or immediately after an event. When something is immediated it is ready for distribution while the memory of the event is still fresh in the minds of the participants. This allows the video to gain more viral traction, because people talk more about things which they've experienced recently than things which they experienced a long time ago.

AUTODOCUMENTARY

auto as in autodidactic + documentary

If you've ever hired a company to document an event for you, you've probably had the experience that somehow, for one reason or another, the end result felt "distant" or unfamiliar with the details and insider stories of the event. Despite high production values and professional editing, your own memory of an event and personal snapshots may feel more vivid than the official documentation. Yet you experience the dilemma of feeling fairly certain that your company doesn't have the talent or the know-how to do any better with an in-house production.

Autodocumentaries are made by the people they are about. Traditionally they were introspective autobiographical art films; the result of an avant-garde approach whereby the director would turn the camera inward to shoot him or herself. What sets today's phenomenon apart is the context of social media in which it occurs. Consider the likelihood that your average customer/audience member:

- Carries a digital video camera or video-enabled mobile device all the time (is an author)
- Uses their mobile device to post updates to a social network (is a distributor)

... the content produced by a person about his or herself is *highly relevant and totally personal* ...

In the past, giving a camera to the documentary subject was criticized due to its ultimate subjectivity and the introduction of a potentially foreign technology into the hands of an amateur. The fear was that by saddling the subject with the responsibility of self-observation it would distract them from behaving “authentically”. Yet in today’s cameraphone saturated world – in 2009 73% of mobile handsets had cameraphone capability² – this is no longer a valid argument. Self-aware behavior *is* authentic behavior. People engage routinely with social networks which constantly implore them to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings. According to Facebook’s own press room, more than 60 million status updates are posted each day!³

In contrast to broadcast media, which follows a one-to-many model of content distribution that requires content to be relevant to a mass audience, the content produced by a person about his or herself is *highly relevant and totally personal* because they are both the subject and the author. When people shoot video of themselves and their surroundings, even if the technical quality is low or amateurish, the content is often very authentic because people are unwitting experts on themselves and their own interests.

EXPERIENCE

It is often possible to orchestrate an immediated autodocumentary in such a way as to enable the exhibition of a rough cut during the very event which is being documented. When this is successful, it allows an incredible thing to happen: the video itself enters into the discourse of the very thing which it is observing. In the best case scenario, this self-reflexivity enables a transcendent perspective;

- a diversity of perspectives can come together to increase understanding and tolerance
- key themes or concepts can be related back to individual experiences
- an overview of an event can be grasped which would otherwise be difficult to observe
- a raise in consciousness can occur as people observe themselves and their behaviors from a distance

In order to have the best possible chance for these layers of reflexivity to develop, it is necessary to have a skilled interdisciplinary person/team whose responsibility it is to prompt, encourage and nurture the development of conceptual and compositional structure at the event. This role can be described most accurately as a “conductor” (or immediator) and this person’s job is not dissimilar to the job of the conductor of an orchestra who is essentially guiding a group of autonomous musicians in the creation of a complex composition in real time. And similar to the many rehearsals which are necessary for an orchestra to play together, so too can a conductor of an immediated autodocumentary benefit the outcome by being involved early on in the event planning process.

Immediated autodocumentary allows each person who collectively participates in an event to become a contributor to the production of a video, giving each person a sense of ownership/authorship in the final result. It creates a feeling of complicity and being “behind the scenes” of the production. This inevitably leads to an increase in word of mouth on social networks during and after the experience, because you’re more likely to talk about something you made than something somebody else made. Nonetheless, participants feel at ease sharing about the experience without feeling like they are bragging because the ultimate responsibility for the work lies with the conductor. Consider the following two simulated Facebook status updates for a sense of this effect;

“*Today I was in a movie that I helped to make!*”
(makes us curious about the potentially novel process)

vs.

“*Today I made a movie. Check it out!*”
(makes us suspicious of blatant self-promotion).

CONCLUSION: TRANSMEDIA BONUS

An immediated autodocumentary process will always generate more source material than what ends up in the final cut. While on the surface this may seem to create a lack of completeness in the final video, it actually helps to extend the production into a broader sphere of social media. The project lives beyond a single YouTube video and encompasses multiple networks, with production photos on Flickr, blog entries from participants, and a whole Twitter discussion around an event-specific hashtag. Immediated autodocumentary is the perfect seed for a universe of interrelated transmedia and can unlock the potential of social media marketing for your next event or production.

To continue this discussion with the author of this paper, use twitter hashtag **#imautodoc** or tag your blog posts, bookmarks or other social media **imautodoc**.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabriel Shalom is a transmedia director/producer, living and working in Berlin, Germany. He is the co-founder of KS12, an interdisciplinary creative studio which produces projects such as *Postcards from Berlin*, a participatory storytelling project, as well as servicing clients in arts and culture. He has been a guest speaker on trends in digital media in London, Porto Alegre, São Paulo and Cologne. He writes a blog about the future of cinema (Quantum Cinema), is a guest author on a blog about augmented reality (Augmentology 1[L]0[L]1) and is a contributor to the futurist online community Space Collective. He is adjunct faculty of the motion design department at the Berlin Technical Art Academy. As of this writing his most recent video is “Delivered in Beta” – an immediated autodocumentary produced by KS12 about open design and innovation created as part of Social Media Week Berlin.

References

- 1) Social Media Revolution
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPOjYhv8>
- 2) TomiAhonen Almanac 2010
<http://www.tomiahonen.com>
- 3) Facebook | Statistics
<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

Resources

KS12 Creative Studio

<http://www.ks12.net>

Quantum Cinema Blog

<http://www.quantumcinema.blogspot.com>

Postcards from Berlin

<http://www.postcardsfromberlin.com>

Augmentology 1[L]0[L]1

<http://arsvirtuafoundation.org/research/>

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