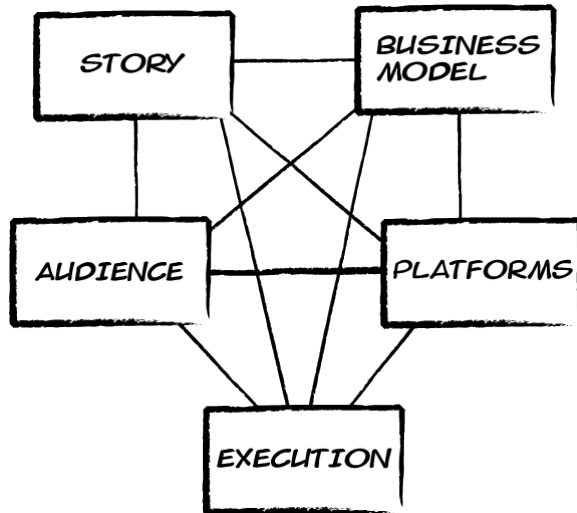


TRANSMEDIA: SELECTING THE RIGHT PLATFORMS

In my earlier post on [Culture Hacker](#) in my [SlideShare presentation](#) created for the Sacramento Film Festival, I described the process for creating transmedia entertainment as shown in Figure 1.

In this post I'd like to focus on selecting the right platforms.

Figure 1 The Development Process



By “platforms” I mean the combination of media plus technology and here I'd like to get you thinking about how you might go about selecting the *right* platforms. Of course there is no universal truth in platform selection – the *right* platforms are those that best suit you and the project. Although I would advocate that all projects have a community platform but that might not be part of your storytelling.

While keeping in mind the larger iterative development process, I recommend a similar five-stage iterative approach to selecting your platforms:

- **Stage 1:** go with your gut
- **Stage 2:** consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each platform
- **Stage 3:** support the weaknesses of a platform with the strengths of others
- **Stage 4:** consider the timing of platforms relative to each other
- **Stage 5:** consider changes to the story to bake-in the platforms and timing.

1. GO WITH YOUR GUT

In the first instance, just go with your gut and list a few platforms that you think will suit your story and audience. This first pass will likely identify platforms based on the following:

- personal desire or bias
- experience

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- popularity with audiences (including fashions and fads)
- ability to collect payment
- availability to find funding or sponsorship
- popularity with the press & bloggers (at certain times some platforms are more sexy than others)
- suitability to the story
- resources available.

Now take a closer look at each platform.

2. DETERMINE EACH PLATFORM'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

In determining a platform's strengths and weaknesses:

- [first](#) - consider the experience you'd like to create and which platforms are best suited to it
- [second](#) – rank a short list of platforms and ensure they create a mix that works synergistically.

Choosing the right platform for the right experience

A senior executive at Yahoo spoke on [Fora.tv](#) recently about how Apple asked Yahoo to design an app for the iPad that would be a “coffee table experience”. The idea was that the iPad would be out on the coffee table in the living room when friends visited and the owner would want to pick up the device and share the Yahoo entertainment with her guests. Yahoo tailored its online content to suit the specifics of the iPad – not just the unique form factor but the unique consumption context too.

Device manufacturers spend a lot of time thinking about how their products will be used. Learn a lesson from these guys and don't just partition your story across platforms but take time to adapt it so it works in the context of the device and the audience lifestyle.

Table 1 and Table 2 present possible ways to segment your platforms by the nature of audience participation. Use this type of approach to inform the platform selection around the type of experience you'd like to create.

Table 1 Possible platform segmentation 1

	Personal	Shared
“Passive” (Lean back)	Watching movie: mobile phone, laptop, slate Reading: book, mobile, laptop, slate, Kindle	Cinema TV Theatre?
“Interactive” (Lean forward)	Handheld game Mobile Laptop Slate Kindle (interactive fiction)	Multiplayer game Theatre? iPad/Slate? – see comment above

Table 2 Possible platform segmentation 2

Location agnostic		Location-dependent	
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Shared</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Shared</i>
Web series Comic/Graphic novel Motion comic Book eBook Pin (badge)			Poster Event Façade projection mapping ¹
Merchandise		Exhibition	
Mobile game ARG (alternative reality game) AR (augmented reality) Postcards and flyers			

Find the right mix of platforms

Given that each platform will have its own strengths and weaknesses, the goal of this stage is to be objective about why a certain platform should remain in the mix. My approach is to score each platform based on the following criteria:

- Revenue gained
- Cost (inc. time) of delivering content
- Ability of platform to enable social spread of content
- Fit to audience lifestyle
- Remarkability (uniqueness/coolness/timeliness/quality) of platform or content
- Timing of release to audience

The table below shows how these might be scored from 5 to 1 and Figure 2 presents an example from the Excel spreadsheet tool that’s available for [download from the Zen Films website](#).

While the exercise feels a little academic, if you have to justify external funding and justify to yourself that it’s worth putting time into something, it’s worth quickly running through the numbers – you might find some surprising results.

Table 3 Rating a Platform

	Rating
Revenue	Good=5, Poor=1
Cost	Low=5, High=1
Spreadability	Good=5, Poor=1
Lifestyle Fit	Good=5, Poor=1
Remarkability	Remarkable=5, Unremarkable=1

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGXcfvWhdDQ>

Figure 2 Platform Tool Example

Index	Vehicle2	Platform2	Revenue	Cost	Spreadabilit	Lifestyle F	Remarkability	Score	Weighting	Final Score
1	Novella	Kindle	5	1	0	3	2	11	2	22
2		PDF	0	1	5	1	1	8	1	8
3		Book	5	3	1	5	2	16	2	32
4		Text	0	1	5	1	1	8	1	8
5	Webseries	YouTube	0	1	5	5	2	13	1	13
6		iTunes	0	2	5	4	2	13	1	13
7		DVD	5	3	1	4	2	15	2	30
8								0	1	0
9								0	1	0
10								0	1	0
11								0	1	0
12								0	1	0
13								0	1	0

3. HAVE PLATFORMS SUPPORT EACH OTHER WITH CALLS-TO-ACTION

Now you know the pros and cons of each platform, you need to find ways to have them support each other. By this I mean that some platforms will be great for spreading awareness but lousy at making money. To combine the strengths of each platform means getting the audience to cross between platforms.

So how do we do this? Firstly it’s important to remember that crossing platforms introduces friction. So rather than assume that audiences want multi-platform experiences, it’s better to ask yourself three questions:

- What’s my **objective** in having audiences cross platforms?
- How can I **motivate** audiences to cross platforms?
- What’s the **reward** when they get there?

The Call to Action

Before I continue, I’d like to introduce a little jargon: the “call to action”.

In web design, the button and wording on a page that asks you to “click here” or “sign up” is known as the “call to action” (CTA). It’s a plea for the user to do something and good designers make these calls-to-action appear to be the default choice – you’re nudged to take action through clear layout, positioning of the button, use of colors and so on.

The term is also used in advertising: “for a limited time only”, “while stocks last”, “a once in a lifetime offer”. These are all calls to action to get you to do something *now* and not put off your decision.

A transmedia experience needs similar CTAs to get audiences to cross platforms.

What’s the objective?

Part of your objective will be to create a fun experience but it will also relate to your business model. Here are three examples.

Example 1. A transmedia project has a comic book and a web series: the comic book will carry advertisements because it’s believed that print advertising is less intrusive than pre-roll video advertising (because the ads won’t get in the way of the story). The value of the advertising is such that it pays for both the comic book and the web series. Both will be given away for free but the advertiser has been promised a minimum number of comic book readers. Hence, it’s important to get web series

viewers to cross platforms to the comic book.

Example 2. A transmedia project has a mix of free and revenue-generating platforms: the free platforms build the audience and the revenue-generating platforms pay for the project.

In Example 2 Your first thought might be that CTAs are needed to ensure the free audience migrates to a revenue platform. But this only provides part of the solution. Table 4 compares the relative audience sizes and revenue potentials across platforms and offers possible strategies to maximize the opportunities. Note that CTAs are used not only to grow revenue but to grow the audience - migrating them to more social platforms and providing spreadable content with CTAs to promote further growth.

Table 4 Assessing your call-to-action: comparing audiences across platforms

		Audience Size and Loyalty/Enthusiasm		
		Casual Audience		Hardcore Audience
		Big	Small	
Platform Revenue	Biggest Revenue	Big Win. Keep the audience here and keep them spending! Refresh content, allow audience to create content (includes discussions, suggestions, live chat).	Provide CTA's to motivate audience to become Hardcore	Respect this audience: don't milk them for money. Use their enthusiasm to grow casual audience. Invest in community and provide spreadable content with CTAs to build wider audience.
	Smaller Revenue	Small Win. Can a gentle CTA motivate them towards a bigger revenue platform?	Provide CTA's to motivate audience to become Hardcore – more revenue will likely follow.	Maximize spreadability of content (see above). Provide gentle CTA to nudge onto higher revenue platforms.
	No Revenue	If revenue is important, need a CTA to send audience to a revenue platform	How is this platform contributing to the experience?	Maximize spreadability of content. CTAs to grow audience and nudge this audience to revenue platforms.

Example 3. In my Lowlifes² project, physical and device-specific copies of the content is paid content while web-based content is free. My primary, albeit weak, CTAs are:

- the project “logo” that displays three media types – informing audiences that this story spans multiple platforms
- the story in each media begs questions that the audience desires to be answered – and expects to find them in the other media; hence enticing them to cross platform.

With Example 3 in regard to moving from a free platform to a paid platform, I’m hoping that the friction of being tied to a desktop (free platform) will encourage supporters to migrate to a paid platform for a better experience more in keeping with their lifestyle – for example, the ability to read a paperback

² <http://www.lowlifes.tv>

book in the bath!

In these examples you can see that the business model creates different objectives for cross-platform traversal.

How do I motivate audiences?

Having decided your objectives, how do you motivate audiences to jump platform?

Digital content can have a nice layout and a URL to prompt action but what about a live street theatre performance – how do you get audiences to cross platform from the street to, say, go online? Possible solutions with this example might be:

- flyers with your URL on it (potentially lacks social/real time web)
- flyers with QR code and Twitter #tag
- merch/pins (badges)/bookmarks and other give-away with QR code or #tag
- performers wearing a t-shirt with a QR code or #tag
- the performers verbally encourage the audience to go online (e.g. shout at them!)

These suggestions answer the mechanics of “how” and assumes that the live audience has mobile phones (so make sure the online landing page is small-screen friendly). But they don’t address “why?”

Motivating the online involvement in this example ought to stress the urgency or immediacy of the situation – don’t let the crowd disperse and hope they’ll connect later: integrate the online component into the performance. Now you’re incentivizing cross-platform activity with the promise of online participation in the live show.

If this isn’t possible or appropriate, you need to consider other incentives ranging from blatant bribery with gifts or prizes to simply the promise of satisfying the audience’s curiosity about what happens next or explaining what on earth the performance is all about.

Figure 3 illustrates a way to think about what you might need to do to motivate audiences to cross or combine platforms. The diagram shows the audience being acted on by two opposing forces: the incentive to migrate (positive force) and the disincentive to migrate represented by “friction” (negative force). By friction I mean anything that makes crossing platforms a pain: increased cost, additional keystrokes, diverted attention, low bandwidth and so on.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate the consequences when the opposing forces are of different magnitudes.

Figure 3 Incentive Vs Friction: Motivating the Audience to Cross Platforms

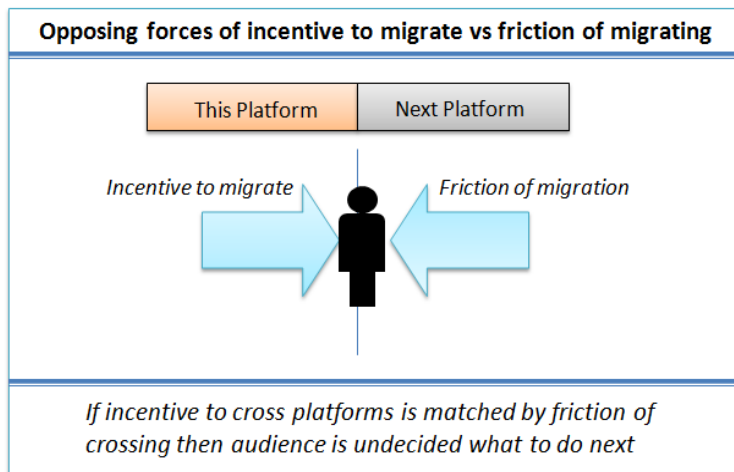


Figure 4 When Incentive > Friction Audience Crosses Platform

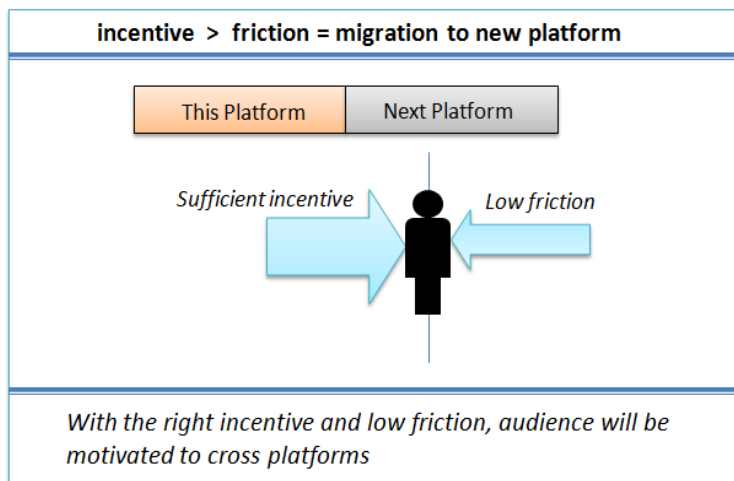
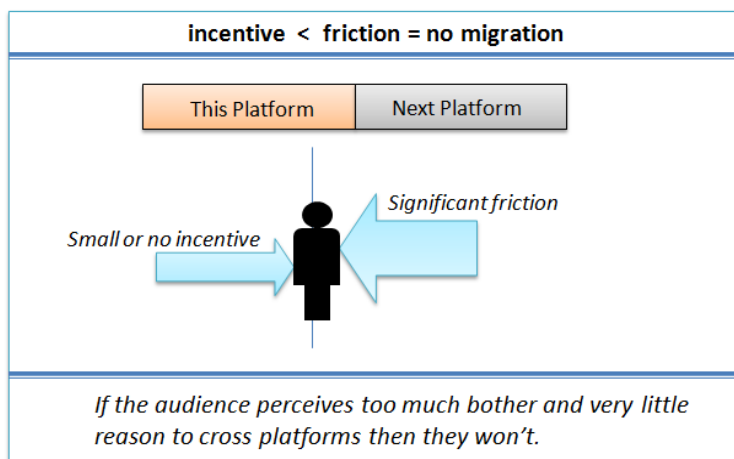


Figure 5 When Incentive < Friction Audience Doesn't Cross Platform



In the example of the street performance, the live activity creates attention and a call-to-action gets them online - but what now? Sell them a DVD? Get them to join a social network or mailing list? It's going to depend on where you are in the project and I'll address this in the next step.

4. PLATFORM TIMING

Unless you have unlimited resources it's likely you'll have to prioritize how platforms are released and to do that it will be helpful to define your objectives. Set your objectives with reference to your business model and resources.

Table 5 and Table 6 provide examples of roll-out strategies dependent on different business models. Note that the steps can and may need to be combined or they may overlap. There's no hard and fast rule – the purpose of the approach is get you thinking logically and covering the bases.

Table 5 Example Platform Release Strategy 1

Step	Objective	Platforms
1	Have paid content available to capitalize on interest from day #1	DVD, Kindle, Pay-to-view/download
2	Release free content to build audience	Web series, comic book
3	Attract the hardcore audience	ARG with "secret" comic books and webisodes as level rewards
4	Work with hardcore to spread word to casual audience	Collaborative/co-created sequel

Table 6 Example Platform Release Strategy 2

Step	Objective	Platforms
1	Attract large casual audience	(sponsored & televised) flash mobs
2	Work to convert casuals to hardcore	Social network with unfolding/evolving Twitter story
3	Work with hardcore to spread word to develop experience	User-generated video & poster competitions
4	Sell paid content	DVD, merch, performance workshops/training

Until now very little has been said about the story. It hasn't been ignored – it's been there as a touchstone throughout these five stages – but now is time to see what we might need to do given our platform preferences.

5. CHANGING THE STORY

Think of the story as having two components:

- “the story” - the whole world that’s created with all the characters stretching out in chronological order
- “the experience” – how the storyworld is revealed to the audience (timing and platforms).

Note that the story might be much larger than the project you’re working on now.

Our objective throughout this process is to have the *story* and the *experience of the story* integrated with the business model. Although you started with the story in mind, platform selection has rightly focused on the experience. Now is the time to sanity check the experience and see if there’s any missing story, story that now needs adapting or story + experience that can be improved.

For example, now you have a roll-out strategy for your platforms (the experience), iterate back through the story and looking for these types of opportunities (in no particular order and please add more of your own):

- Twists
- Surprises
- Cliff hangers
- Inciting incidents
- Reunions
- Breakups
- Conflict
- Discovery
- Exposition
- Reversals
- Suspense
- Threats
- Complications
- Conclusions