



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

JULY 2010 SEMINAR SUMMARY

Being creative with social media

6.00-8.00pm, Monday 26 July 2010
Australia Council, 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

CHAIR

Fee Plumley has a background in theatre in the UK as a Stage Manager and Prop Maker. After graduating from a BA in Theatre Design and Technology (1995) she became curious about the internet. An MA in Interactive Multimedia Production (1997) kick-started a transition into media arts. Fee has since combined her love for performance and media arts, producing innovative interactive events for clients including Douglas Rushkoff (Ecstasy Club, Manchester 1997) and the Manchester Literature Festival (The Burgess Project, Manchester 2006). Self-described as a "Techno-Evangelist", she has curated public screen content (GMI, London, 1999 & BBC Bigger Picture, 2004), enabled community webcasting (Superchannel.org 1999-03) and has been a speaker and a juror at several international arts gatherings (ISEA, Banff New Media Institute, AIMIA & BAFTA) and educational establishments.

Best known for encouraging people to be creative with their mobile phones through *the-phone-book Limited* (UK), Fee continues to techno-evangelise as the new Digital Program Officer at the Australia Council for the Arts.

PANEL

David Ryding has worked as writer, director, dramaturge and Arts worker and is currently the Director of the New South Wales Writers' Centre. Prior to this he was the Director of the Emerging Writers' Festival in Melbourne. He has also been the Artistic Director of the Mainstreet Theatre Company, Associate Director for Children's Theatre Company Barking Gecko and Festival Director of MUDFEST for Melbourne University Student Union.

Lachlan "Warlach" Hibbert-Wells has been involved with social media and digital communications for some time, originally through a thesis at the University of Technology, Sydney, focused on changing modes of interaction and technology, and later through a number of roles in companies and agencies. More recently Lachlan was head of social media for the global Earth Hour campaign, followed by freelancing for a range of clients both independently and with a Sydney-based agency, before finally joining Daemon Group as their Digital Planning Manager in July.

Facebook... MySpace... YouTube... blogs... Twitter... Social media is the topic of the moment. A recent Nielsen poll found that use of social media in Australia was the highest in the world, ahead of the US, the UK and Europe.

In terms of marketing and promotion, social media offers an inexpensive and potentially highly visible option for artists and arts organisations. As the use of digital technologies increases across society, it offers the opportunity to access and engage with audiences regardless of size or location.

Social media also offers the possibility of producing and distributing arts content in new ways that engage people in a more active and participatory manner.

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But should artists and arts organisations use social media just because it's cheap and available? Alongside the opportunities there are also many challenges, such as understanding why it is being used, controlling content, protecting privacy and copyright, measuring its effectiveness, and knowing when it isn't relevant.

SAMAG's July seminar explored the opportunities, realities and challenges of using social media as the Panel discussed how artists and arts organisations, regardless of their size, can use social media to their best advantage.

With Fee Plumley as its new Digital Program Officer, the Australia Council is exploring how to use social media. This has included developing a blog <http://www.artsdigitalera.com/> which is introducing a whole new audience to the Australia Council.

Fee gave several examples of arts organisations successfully using social media:

- The Sydney Festival has used Twitter to manage crowds and ticket sales.
- A number of opera companies worked together to set up a Twitter competition to summarize the plot of an opera (<http://wagneropera.blogspot.com/2010/04/twitter-opera-plot-contest.html>).
- Dancers from the Australian Ballet have been tweeting about their daily activities as a promotion for the company. Visit their blog: <http://www.australianballet.com.au/main.taf?p=2.1.56>

In other theatres, people have been tweeting during performances, sparking a passionate debate, as described in an article *Geeks, tweets and bums on seats* by Elissa Blake for the Sydney Morning Herald (10 July 2010) <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/geeks-tweets-and-bums-on-seats-20100709-103g8.html>. This debate highlights the need to consider how and when it's appropriate to use social media.

What's right for one organisation and audience may not be right for your organisation.

If you're considering using social media as a marketing tool, Fee recommends building an audience before you try to sell them something. She suggests starting with a Twitter account and using the search function to find tweets that you can contribute to, thereby starting a conversation, finding out what's happening and what your audience is talking about.

Fee's three big tips:

- Just because social media exists doesn't mean you have to use it.
- You need to find out if the community wants to have a 'conversation' with you.
- Be social, when people talk to you, talk back. Be responsive.

David described his experience using social media to promote writers' festivals. The first was successful, the second less so. The first example was promoting the Emerging Writer's Festival in Melbourne in 2009. The event had expanded from a weekend conference to a 10-day event. As an organisation with very little funding they decided to generate interest using Twitter. They followed "everyone": writers in Australia and overseas and arts organisations, added comments to their tweets and thanked them when they supported the Festival. The Festival gathered over 1000 followers. The campaign created awareness of the Festival and more importantly, David noted, it provided organisers with an understanding of the interests of the audience.

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More recently, at the NSW Writers' Centre, David has found that although the Centre has 1000 plus followers on Twitter, people involved with the Centre don't tweet about them. Thus showing that this isn't an effective tool for them at the moment. In the next few months the NSW Writers' Centre is planning to start a Twitter book club which they think will more effectively engage followers and attract a larger audience leading up to next year's festival.

The title of Lachlan's presentation, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, refers to a 1930's article by Walter Benjamin, which says that artists will be able to use connected levels of technology to share art (www.dzignism.com/articles/benjamin.pdf). This reference also reminds us that social networks "have existed forever". Creative people have always found ways to connect with each other and market their work and events with very little money. Social media provides new and exciting opportunities to do this. Lachlan encouraged the audience to explore what's around and then choose whether or not to get involved.

Lachlan noted that if you are going to use social media you need to "go where the market is". This could be on a number of sites, including Twitter and Facebook. To establish a community around your 'brand' Lachlan says you need to approach it like an "ongoing relationship": be responsive and develop a clear and consistent persona or presence. He noted that it's important to remember that through social media you can create an "aura of individual connection" and you should use this.

Lachlan then talked about the ways that artists are using the Internet. Examples include "mash ups" where artists mix data from different sources to create something new, such as "Twittervision" which matches the geographic location of tweets and the content of tweets (<http://beta.Twittervision.com/>)

An audience member asked how he could promote a band through social media, providing a great case study for discussion. Lachlan suggested starting by letting people at gigs know how to find you on the Internet as well as looking for people who are doing similar things and starting a conversation with them and their followers. He said it's important to ask questions and respond, and not to tell people what to do. He suggested starting small and seeing what works. If something doesn't work, stop doing it and try something new. Lachlan also recommended being careful when using different media, for example if you use Facebook and Twitter it is best to put different content on each. If you use Facebook don't write too much text – people don't scroll down to read words they can't immediately see on the page. With Twitter, try to keep 'tweets' to 120 characters (rather than the permitted 140 characters) so that others can 're-tweet' your posting, thereby allowing it to reach larger audiences. Consider ways to build a mailing list e.g. provide 'give aways' when people sign up and give you their email address. Once you get started there are a range of web analytic tools that can be used to monitor traffic on your website (e.g. <http://www.google.com.au/analytics/>) and to see when your brand or event is mentioned in social media (e.g. <http://www.socialmention.com/>)

Lachlan noted, social media is not really about the technology, it's about personal engagement, giving people a personal experience. So, don't think of your event as the be all and end all of the engagement with your audience. An arts event can stretch beyond the actual event, with associated activities before, during and after. The use of social media can help to link into this social engagement and build engagement throughout the different stages.

In response to a question about how you develop a marketing campaign using the Internet, Lachlan asked, "How do you do other campaigns?" and commented that you start by setting some long term goals, deciding

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the kind of presence you want have and what you want to achieve (e.g. raising awareness, attracting visitors to your site, or achieving sales), and then consider what media suits your plan.

Then there was the question: "How can I make money using social media?" Suggestions included charging subscription fees and selling merchandise and tickets to events. Fee gave the example of <http://www.posse.com/>, a site that has been set up to sell tickets to concerts. Fans can sign up to become 'agents' and they are paid a commission when their friends and colleagues buy tickets. Fee also suggested looking at the blog of Amanda Palmer who recently made \$15,000 in less than three minutes <http://www.amandapalmer.net/afp/>.

Now some important things to consider when using social media:

- Firstly, it is important to consider your privacy and protecting your community. When you sign up to some sites, such as Facebook, the site owners have the right to share your content in any way they want to. So it is important to read and consider the terms and conditions before signing up.
- While the Internet provides a great opportunity to write about your work and your interests, don't share personal information or write things that could be harmful or offensive to others.
- For artists there is also a concern about people 'stealing' their work. Sites such as Flickr have arrangements in place to protect copyright via links to the creative commons website and labelling conventions. Creative Commons is a non-profit corporation set up to make it easier for people to share and build on the work of others, consistent with the rules of copyright. Creative Commons provide free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, or use it commercially. And, if you're going to quote or show the work of others make sure you acknowledge them.

Remember, social media is not really about technology. Social media is about personal engagement, giving people a personal experience, and creating connections. So, don't be overwhelmed. Start exploring.

Weblinks

Fee Plumley and the Australia Council: www.Twitter.com/artsdigitalera and www.artsdigitalera.com

Sign up for a Twitter account: <https://Twitter.com/signup>

Sign up for a Facebook account: <http://www.Facebook.com/login.php>

Sign up for a Flickr account: <http://www.flickr.com/>

Learn about creative commons licensing <http://creativecommons.org/about>

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