
DIGITAL IDEAS CAMP

Introduction

Digital Ideas Camp is an initiative by Arts Council England to boost digital development skills across the South East of England. Blast Theory developed a series of workshops, meetings and mentoring sessions to share practices and develop different approaches to working through digital ideas, assisting cultural organisations to better scope, develop, fundraise for and launch digital artistic projects. Working with Blast Theory, digital leaders such as Matt Locke, Tom Dolan and Rachel Coldicutt shared practical ideas about the ways in which new technology and digital platforms can inform the work artists make. Following the workshops, participants were given the opportunity to apply for one-to-one mentoring sessions to help develop a current project.

This document contains notes from the *Digital Ideas Camp* sessions that took place in Faversham, Brighton and Portslade only. Notes are not provided from the Oxford session. Please bear in mind that these are our notes – an attempt to summarise what was said and done as we heard it. We intended them to provide a resource to enable participants to look back and reflect. They are not however intended to be analysis of what took place or the synthesis of a coherent argument from this. Neither should they be read as directly quoting named individuals or representing final or fully-thought through views.

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Participant & Speakers Overview

Workshops

- Briefing:** 21st September 2012 – Lighthouse, Brighton
Workshop 1: 1st November 2012 – Modern Art Oxford, Oxford
Workshop 2: 18th January 2013 – Lighthouse, Brighton
Workshop 3: 25th January 2013 – Creek Creative, Faversham
Final Event: 7th June 2013 – Blast Theory, Portslade

Facilitators, Mentors and Speakers

- Jon Pratty**, Relationship Manager for Digital and Creative Economy, Arts Council England
Kirsty Jennings, Business Manager, Blast Theory
Matt Adams, Artist, Blast Theory
Matt Locke, Director, Storythings
Rachel Coldicutt, Director, Caper
Sarah Julia Clark, Marketing and Office Coordinator, Blast Theory
Sophie Sampson, Lead Producer, Caper
Tom Dolan, Director, Leaning Forward

Participants

- Adam Steiner**, Silhouette Press
Alex Butterworth, Amblr LLP
Alex Eisenberg, Live Art Development Agency
Andrew Jackson, Canterbury Christ Church University Business School
Andy Evans, Interdisciplinary Artist
Beth Cuenco, Workers of Art CIC
Cathy Westbrook, PANeK
Ceri Gorton, Oxford City Council
Chris Higgins, The Map
Daniel Thompson, Block Stop
David Parker, Oscar Bright
Duncan Brannon, Kent City Council
Gayle Sutherland, South East Bridge
Görkem Acaroğlu, The 24 Hour Experience
Heather Burgess, Sun Pier House Chatham
James Yorke, Become Known
Jessica Cheetham, Root Experience
Joel Scott, Goat and Monkey
Joseph Norman, Furry Tree
Katherine Proudlove, Modern Art Oxford
Kevin Bacon, The Royal Pavilion & Museums
Liat Wassershtrom, *Freelance*
Lisa Sullivan, Oxford Playhouse
Lizzie Banks, Oscar Bright
Lucy Medhurst, Stour Valley Arts
Oli Back, Block Stop
Pat Wilson, Visual Artist / Curator
Paul Bonnan, Arts Council England
Robert Jarvis, Artist
Rory Keenan, *Freelance*
Rosie Clarke, Culture 24
Sally Scott, Goat and Monkey
Sara Madgewick, The Absent Collector
Sarah Pickthall, Cusp Inc.
Simon Magnus, Root Experience
Simon Williams, BBC
Stephanie Fuller, *Freelance*
Stephen Connett, Media Punk
Steve Cook, *Freelance*
Tom Hamilton, University of Sussex
Tracy Falcon, Artist and Artist Educator
Trish Scott, Freelance Artist

Defining Digital, Interdisciplinary Collaboration & Audience Relationships

Defining Digital

Matt Adams began the day by encouraging participants to consider the meaning of 'digital', urging them instead to think of projects in terms of their interactive qualities. He went on to describe how digital is being used as a single umbrella word to cover a whole range of activities. It becomes particularly dangerous within the arts sector when thinking about how we market our work and talk to our audiences. What does digital mean for artists, the making of art, theatre, dance and other disciplines?

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Matt continued by introducing collaborative projects that Blast Theory has worked on, across a variety of disciplines. Blast Theory began work with the [Mixed Reality Lab](#) in 1997, developing projects such as *Desert Rain* (1999) - a large-scale installation, performance and game using virtual reality, marking the first output of the group's collaboration. The Mixed Reality Lab at the [University of Nottingham](#) is a dedicated facility where computer scientists, psychologists, sociologists, engineers, architects and artists collaborate to explore the potential of ubiquitous, mobile and mixed reality technologies. This collaboration has also yielded projects such as *Can You See Me Now?*, *Uncle Roy All Around You*, *I Like Frank* and *Day Of The Figurines*. It also contributed to a range of awards, [research](#) and over a dozen published papers.

Blast Theory has strong relationships with a range of research organisations in the UK and the EU. Here Matt emphasised the interesting dynamic when working with people from different fields and the advantages of a varied approach to ideas. He also touched on Blast Theory's encounters with different technological possibilities through mobile, network and GPS when working with other collaborators including Sony Net Services, Nokia and the Swedish Institute of Computer Science. It is important to look outside the art world at other disciplines and be aware of how digital is being used in these areas.

Discussions on the importance of collaboration continued throughout the day, taking into account the differences in budgets for both arts and digital organisations. Different paces of development across disciplines were also mentioned, considering that the arts industry may be having a conversation now, which the digital industry may have had 10 or 15 years ago.

***"If you think one stage further than the technology industry, you can really go places"* - Tom Dolan**

Audience Relationships

Matt discussed his approach to digital technologies and the shift in audience experiences he has observed. As a theatre maker he saw room for progression in the experience an audience have whilst viewing theatre, recognising that the relationship with an artist and their audience could be reconfigured. The idea that people came to a building and sat in rows to engage with theatre seemed to be quite an 18th Century structure to him.

What attracted Matt to theatre was the thrill in a specific performer and a specific audience member coming together at a specific time; the excitement of the live spark. He realised through this thinking, that the same experience could be achieved anywhere, not necessarily in the confines of a theatre, nor in the same room as a performer. This way of approach to artistic relationships could be completely reconfigured and re-thought.

Key Questions

- How disruptive will technologies be to our culture?
 - How strong an influence is technology on the way we work?
 - How can we learn from the legacy of arts projects across other sectors?
 - How do you ethically manage projects when there are such a variety of salary expectations across different disciplines?
 - Often there are various programs existing to do something, when do you know it's time to create something new?
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The Three C's: Complexity, Context and Competition

Jon Pratty introduced his approach to idea generation, using his experience at Arts Council England to give advice on applying for arts funding. He presented some positive developmental thoughts about how people could progress their ideas and talked about his experiences of sifting through large quantities of funding applications. Jon expressed the importance of “The Three C's”: Complexity, Context and Competition.



Jon Pratty introduces his approach to ideas generation (@Blast Theory 2013)

Complexity

When we conceive of ideas we carry on thinking, carry on connecting other ideas up and don't always recognise the core of the idea, described by Jon as “the part where if you snipped all the branches off, it would still grow into a nice big tree”. When making an application, it is integral to communicate your ideas concisely.

Jon stressed the importance of stripping ideas back by looking at the fundamentals of what you want to communicate or achieve. What is the easiest way an idea could be carried out?

When considering funding applications it is important to keep it simple. Performing short pitches to your friends or colleagues is a great exercise to practice expressing an idea quickly and simply. Prepare for incremental changes and ensure that your ideas are of the right scale, considering the complexity at every stage of your thinking. If the assessor, the funder or the investor can't spot the real core then there is still developmental work to be done. What is desirable and what is technically possible?

Context

It is valuable to be aware of your cultural landscape. Be aware of the academic context of your work in comparison to other artists work, not only in relation to the creative industry, but their research, partners and approach. There may have been a project already funded, which is similar to yours, or many projects with the same focus. Ask yourself, what are you going to add to that canon of work? Is what you are going to do better than that? Does it augment it? How do you set your ideas in the landscape to prove that they are really innovative, or maybe just that they aren't particularly new, but very useful?

Competition

Everyone is in competition for audience and funding and so it's essential to do some sort of competitive analysis, becoming aware of who is around you and where their work may overlap with yours. Are there similar artists with more resources? Be fertile about ideas, have plenty of them and variations of each.

Participants seemed concerned about keeping ideas safe but were met with the response that there are no great ideas; it's all about the execution. Mentors went on to say that an idea could often be a tangent of someone else's idea. Tom Dolan gave an example of this

when talking about Nike Plus, a motivational running app with GPS tracking and audio feedback, linking you to your friends whilst you run. Taking the idea one step further, Six to Start created *Zombies, Run!*, an app combining running with radio and more game-like elements. The app very effectively added a narrative to something that is good for you, sending you on missions to run from zombies and proved to be much more popular.

“Fall forwards, don’t be afraid to fail but learn and adapt” - Jon Pratty

Matt used fanzines as another example: the fact that there were already 25,000 zines didn’t stop someone else coming along and finding a voice in that medium - it was the specificity of that voice that potentially engineered its success. There is a tendency to steer away from trends and find the next new innovation but sometimes it’s beneficial to latch on to what is popular and adapt it.

***“If two of you are running through a forest being chased by a bear, you don’t have to outrun the bear just the other person”
- Tom Dolan***

Mapping the Context

Participants were invited to think more deeply about the context in which they are working. The aim of the task was to identify factors that shape the way participants are working and share each of these thoughts on a post it. This could be large or small, specific or general. Each consideration was stuck on a wall and clustered by theme, with many thoughts aligning as the task progressed.



Several questions and considerations were raised around social networking, with Twitter and Facebook posing challenges for artists when engaging with their audience. Social networking opens up new opportunities for direct interaction with the audience. Comedians deal with social media easily, as within their practice they already have a residual experience of how to talk to an audience. In the creative industry it is something we are forced to learn. One participant felt that the necessity to shout, to tweet and to make your voice heard sometimes makes you forget what that voice is. When analysing the language of social media, many felt that the people who really stand out in social media are those who just speak.

Comments and Questions

Finance

- How do you manage the creative and financial risks of making new work?
- How can you engage your audience to source funding directly from them?

Audience

- What are the new opportunities to reach audiences?
- How do we make the most of the online platform and connect with an audience effectively?
- How do we connect with an international audience?
- How do you take an interactive performance/experience which could be perceived as theatre and turn it into something more accessible to a wider audience through your marketing and communication?
- How can artists and new technologies inform the way in which schools function?

Pitching

Each participant was asked to do a short pitch to the group, outlining an idea that they are currently developing, and invited other participants to give feedback. The pitches ranged from people with fully formed ideas to those who were just interested in exploring the possibilities that new technologies can bring to their fields. The pitches ranged from interactive websites, immersive theatre and other participatory artwork to sound installations and app development. Others were interested in developing their online archiving systems and simply finding ways to deal with the way interactivity changes the ways audiences view work.

Common feedback from the pitches was the need for participants to:

- Interrogate and clarify the idea
- Keep the pitch focussed on the USP of the project
- Identify how the audience would interact with the project
- Identify the audience take-home experience
- Identify any social stimulants to engage people with the work



Personas and User Centred Design

Thinking About Users - Human Factors

Tom Dolan began his talk by discussing the human factors that affect the design of digital projects. When considering factors such as human lifestyle patterns, ideas often need to be adapted as there is a tendency to make assumptions about your audience that may not reflect their daily routines. It's important to identify the user patterns that already exist, what your audience is comfortable with, as well as what their expectations and barriers are. It's integral to spot hesitation within audience responses. If people don't understand then they will lose interest. For example when using an app, it is important to consider what times of day it is likely to be used, where it would be used, what its context is and whether that would affect the device it's available on.



Tom Dolan advises participants at the Brighton Ideas Camp (@Blast Theory 2013)

MTV – A Diary Study

Tom used a project he worked on for MTV to further explain the importance of user awareness. MTV created an online archive of their older TV series, forming a website aimed at teenagers, who were invited to pay via text message to watch old episodes of their favourite programs on their laptops.

The developmental stages of the project involved varied user-centred testing such as a diary study. Users were invited to keep a diary of their usage, noting the times of day and locations they wanted to watch programmes, as well as how versatile or limiting it was to use the site. Developers were also able to gain audience insight into areas such as price sensitivity, payment processes, episode availability and design.

Testing the beta version in this way formed a fundamental part of the research and enabled MTV to identify the lifestyle patterns of their audience. This particularly helped to detect the need for sharing features and ensured the long running of the project, without too many changes post launch.

Attention and Premise

User centred testing is key when considering the cost of changes during the process of development. This is made evident in the diagram below, taken from Tom's presentation. It is clear that the earlier a problem is identified, the cheaper it is to fix. It's integral to communicate with clients or colleagues and keep them in the loop all the way through a project. Sketching in front of clients and keeping the design process informal at the start helps people to openly express their opinions without feeling like an idea is set in stone. It is valuable to keep clients excited about the core of the idea rather than the extras that aren't a priority and this will keep costs down. Work on the minimum viable product first, meeting the main concrete needs and then consider getting further funding and support for the extras. Don't dilute the thing that will make people remember you.



THINK OF YOURSELF! A SLIDE FROM TOM DOLAN'S PRESENTATION (@TOM DOLAN 2013)

Reward Cycles

What's in it for the audience? Why would they go back to your product? The importance of using your website as a narrative was thusly discussed. The beginning starts with a compelling premise or idea, drawing the user in. The middle considers what happens next and keeps them interested. The ending often introduces a twist or transformation, creating a talking point or encouraging users to visit again.

"The rest of the internet is one click away" - Tom Dolan

The Social Object

What is the social object of a project; what are the ways in which social networking can be used to capitalise on the proliferation of media devices?

Tom used ITV's *The Only Way is Essex* as an example, specifically the use of Joey Essex's catchphrases, which have often trended as hashtags on Twitter during an episode's airtime. ITV is able to pre-empt these crazes because of the level of scripting in the show and create social objects ready for fans to share, linking directly back to ITV, before the viewers have a chance to create them. This social object can be as simple as a comical photo of Joey with his catchphrase "She's a salty potato" typed underneath.

There has also been much success when teaming apps with TV shows such as *Million Pound Drop* and *Dancing on Ice* and often the interaction of the apps is built into the editorial of the show, with users playing online and watching the shows simultaneously.



Harry Styles creates a Twitter sign for a fan after receiving a personalised video. (@Twitter @YouTube)

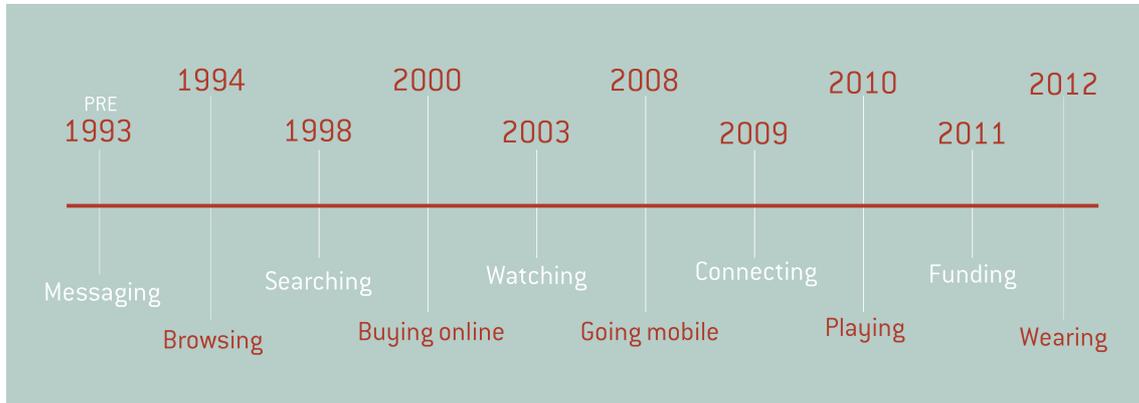
Twitter signs are another example of popular social objects. This phenomenon was created by @Stephensaul who encouraged celebrities to tweet a photo of themselves, holding up a piece of paper with a written message to a fan. Fans would go to great lengths to receive one from their idols, creating poems, videos and drawings just for one tweet.

Comments and Questions

Talk of 'the social object' prompted discussion about the voice and tone of a website and the changes in language that are now expected. The transition has been made from art jargon to informal first-person narrative in order to open up a conversation with the audience. Participants working in the museum and gallery sectors felt challenged by this prospect and wondered where they align with this mode, moving away from traditional formal language.

Designing for Behaviours

Audiences already have a lot of digital habits. They have clear expectations and boundaries and they know what feels comfortable and what doesn't. This is the landscape creatives are designing on. Today people are much more digitally literate, however they aren't all approaching the use of digital devices from the same angle.



Digital Habits (@Blast Theory 2013)

Matt Locke began his presentation by questioning:

- What do you want people to do?
- Why would they do this?
- Where would they do this?
- What is the call to action?
- What do you need to make?
- How will you measure it?

User centred design begins by imagining the life of your user. Many companies write out scripts, giving users names, jobs and genders. With each persona they try and imagine their voices, their goals, expectations of the service and the whole context surrounding their experience in order to design a tool that works effectively. Creating personas, as part of the design process is often a method used quite poorly, regularly becoming dogmatic and stereotypical. Other more effective methods of creating personas are conducting interviews or using social network profiles to see a range of people within your selected target market. It's important to break out of the stereotypes for who you think you are designing for.

Two suggested resources for user centred design were [Keynotopia](#), a user experience template and [a guide to experiencing prototyping methods](#). Matt also suggested [Get Mental Notes](#), a great card deck that helps you use social psychology when understanding user behaviours.

Goals and Behaviours

The goal is the point of connection with your audience where they realise what you are doing. A good goal is something that is important to the business, achievable within the project and something that can be directly improved by the project. Behaviours are specific actions by your audience/users that directly relate back to your product/project as well as your key goals. It is also important that both goals and user behaviours are measurable.

Goal

Not clear enough: "We want to make the biggest transmedia documentary project"

Specific and measurable: "We want the biggest opening weekend for a cinema release documentary in 2013"

Behaviour

Not clear enough: Sharing on Twitter

Specific and measurable: Sending a tweet including your account. Posting photos from a trip on Twitter using your hashtags and replying to/retweeting your message.

At this stage you should have decided what you are going to do and what your audience needs to do to be part of your experience.

Drivers and Contexts

A driver is the motivation and the underlying interest for an action. After considering your goals and behaviours the next stage is to think about the tools that people will need to use your service and where these behaviours will happen. Do your users need certain things in place already such as a Facebook account? What is going to be your call to action that drives users to take part or use your service? Although it's important to consider the cause, the content, the brand or technology within a project, if your audience can't situate your call to action in their lives then they won't take part. Designers need to think about designing not for one individual, but for the conversation they will have with their friend and the information they will share on Facebook or Twitter.

Driver

Not clear enough: Interest in Theatre

Specific and measurable: Lives local to Kensington Palace. Is studying relevant subject at school. Is a fan of talent/TV show/etc. Wants to organise a day out for a specific reason

After thinking about what they are going to do, the next stage is to think about the time and place where the behaviour will happen. Consider the site they will be using, the product or device they will use, the time/day/month/season they will do it and the people they will involve.

Ivy4Evr was a project Matt worked on with Channel 4 and Blast Theory where teenagers communicated with a fictional character called Ivy through SMS messaging. The target market meant that there were certain dips in usage when the teenagers were at school in the day or having dinner with their families when they returned, so the service mainly peaked in the evenings. There is no use creating a service for someone who won't be available at the time it's available for usage.

Context

Not clear enough: Using an iPhone

Specific and measurable: Using an iPhone on the train on the way to a visit. Using the camera app on a user's iPhone and then uploading onto Instagram to share photos at your event with followers.

Resources for drivers and contexts:

- Article on using 'mental model diagrams': [here](#)
- Resource toolkit for service design [here](#)

Calls to Action and Products

A call to action is the specific messages you will use to drive behaviours. What is your product and how will you make/build it to support the behaviours? What is the language your audience will use with each other?

Language has changed online due to social media. Before 2004 most of the language on the Internet stemmed from technical roots, but once social media became popular we began to spend more time talking to other human beings via the Internet, rather than just responding to computer error messages etc. It's now even more important to write engaging copy for the web and technical devices for a call to action. Sometimes it feels exhausting to work in a digital media space because it's so fast changing. Thinking about users rather than the devices is a more valuable use of your time.

The web presence of a project needs to be considered and not just online for the sake of it.

Not clear enough: Create a website

Specific and measurable: Create a blog that will tell the story of our characters before, during and after the theatre event.

Resources for calls to action and products:

- Presentation about the importance of copy as an interface [here](#)
- Presentation about launching 'minimum viable products' and iterating quickly: [here](#)

Digital Ideas Camp – Final Event

Following the feedback from participants, we hosted a final event at the Blast Theory studios on the 7th June 2013. This event was open to all previous Digital Ideas Camp participants across the region, 20 participants attended this session. Enabling further support to the development of digital projects, the event offered focused sessions around technical development and effective social media campaigning.

Session 1 - Technical Development Case study

Martin Flintham, one of the Transitional Fellows in Computer Science in Horizon at the University of Nottingham, led the technical development session alongside Blast Theory's Matt Adams. The University of Nottingham has collaborated with Blast Theory for over ten years - the longest and most productive partnership between a university and a group of artists anywhere in the world. The session focused on detailed case studies of two Blast Theory and the University of Nottingham collaborations and addressed questions such as: *What is it like for developers to work with artists? How do you find developers to work with?*

Session 2 - How to Create Engaging and Effective Social Media Campaigns



Abhay Adhikari (@British Council Russia)

Abhay Adhikari, digital engagement specialist for the cultural and creative industries, led the second session of the day. Abhay has worked on a range of global web-based projects with organisations including BBC World Service Trust, he regularly delivers sell out strategy seminars at The Guardian and Channel 4. Abhay led an interactive session focusing on how to define your desired message; how to define the type of audience interaction that will benefit you, and understanding how to curate your audience and content to maximise your resources and ensure your aims are met.

“The session helped spark creative thinking in terms of development and social networking...fantastic information on how to approach and work with technical partners as well as inspiration on how to create strong web campaigns”