

# Public Service Publishing

## Quality, Expertise and Social Media

One of the most heated media debates involves the collision of old and new media and focuses on quality and the role of expertise.

Andrew Keen's book "The Cult of the Amateur" argues that the so-called Web 2.0 revolution is based on the promise of bringing more truth to more people. Yet there are frequent revelations that all is not well with the reliability, accuracy and veracity of the information we get on the Internet. Many valued cultural institutions – the professional media – are being challenged by a wealth of amateur, user-generated, free content unfettered by the existing checks and balances of professional standards and editorial control. Keen regards this as a serious problem from both a cultural and economic perspective.

James Surowiecki in "The Wisdom of Crowds" argues the case for collective decision-making – why the many are smarter than the few. His well-chosen cases – often counter-intuitive – provide evidence that in certain circumstances, collective estimates and choices outperform those of experts. Harnessing such collective expertise is a potential that has not yet been fully exploited in his view.

One of the most vitriolic debates concerns the need for experts and editorial control. It led in September 2006 to Larry Sanger (one of the founders of Wikipedia) abandoning his own joint creation and setting up a collectively produced reference work called *Citizendium* with explicit and transparent editorial control. The nature of the debate can be followed in blogs such as Shirky (2006) in which the issues of quality, expertise and experts were aired.

A more measured and insightful contribution to the debate is Henry Jenkins's "Convergence Culture – where old and new media collide". Jenkins offers a detailed analysis of several recent media phenomena: "spoilers" working collectively on reality shows to identify the finalists and winner of the series before the final episode, the importance of Harry Potter as a stimulus for media literacy among teenagers and the new relationship between politics and popular culture. Jenkins sees convergence as a cultural rather than a technological phenomenon, something that changes the roles and balance of power of the various stakeholders in popular culture and media in ways that most of us have not yet fully understood.

## Social Media, Organisational Framework and Business Models

One of the issues that became painfully clear in 2001 in connection with the "Dot Death" meltdown of commercial Internet initiatives is that new media also require funding – there is no such thing as a free lunch.

Prior to 2001, a number of initiatives were set in motion with little or no regard to the organisational framework and the need for a sustainable business model. Since then, a lot more thought has been devoted to sustainability, both in terms of the development and maintenance of the product itself and in terms of the economic aspects of media production and distribution.

The Dot Death phenomenon also had an impact on the balance between old and new media. From having been given the image of huge, unresponsive media dinosaurs

"old media" began to use their assets in new ways and come to terms with the challenges of the Internet (and to a lesser degree games and mobile devices). While the traditional media companies may not fully have got up to speed in a world of cultural convergence, they are making concerted efforts to do so. All of them need to realign their strategies to take into account that people are not just consumers of media but have acquired a broader range of media habits. Increasingly they want a say in the matter, they want to take part and even create media themselves.

What the events of the last two to three years show us is that social media have come to stay. We may not find the term Web 2.0 particularly helpful, and the semantic web may be an unreachable Holy Grail, but even so, "professional media" will have to coexist with user-generated content. So rather than begrudge the existence of social media, it seems to be more realistic to examine their nature and to discuss the organisational framework in which social media can be created and shared in a sustainable fashion.

On next issue, I'll continue to talk about the possible scenarios for assuring the sustainability of social media in the future, and use some examples to show how Public Service Publishing (PSP) as a natural extension of the public service broadcasting remit.

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# The Other PSP –

The term Public Service Broadcasting has been with us for decades. Its origins can be traced back to the establishment of the BBC and the availability of radio and television broadcasts as a public good. With the emergence of information services like teletext and the World Wide Web, new distribution networks such as the Internet and the GSM mobile telephone network and media such as electronic and video games, it became necessary to shift the focus from public service broadcasting (PSB) to public service media (PSM).

This paper takes a close look at social media and the issues of quality, individual and collective expertise. It highlights four possible scenarios for assuring the sustainability of social media in the future. Using examples showing how public service broadcasters are already engaging in social media, it argues the case for Public Service Publishing (PSP) as a natural extension of the public service broadcasting remit.

## PSP – what's in a name?

As Christian S. Nissen (2006) mentioned in a recent report, ‘a

special and contentious issue at present is the role of public media in the field of “new digital services”. Commercial media players argue that PSM should stick to traditional radio and TV broadcasting and stay out of emerging areas such as the Internet and the nascent market for mobile services. If allowed to work with Internet services, the argument goes that PSM should limit their activities to services directly linked to broadcasts and should not offer content independent of radio and television programming.’

‘An example of this line of reasoning is to be found in several complaints about [European] public broadcasters raised by private companies. In recent years, the Commission has conducted special investigations in public media activities outside the traditional (read: broadcast) programming activities of public media. It seems here that some “online information services” can be accepted by the Commission. It still remains to be seen how the term “information service” ultimately will be defined. Whether it will lead to restrictions limiting broadcasters to information services linked to their broadcast

programming or will apply a broader definition allowing for broadcast-independent services in parallel to full-scale radio and television broadcasting remains to be seen.’

‘If they were not to do so, public media would lose contact with a growing number of citizens. The changes in the media consumption patterns of audiences under the age of 25 – already on the move from broadcast to new media – is a warning illustration of this threat.’

On a different policy front, in the course of 2004, a new acronym emerged. Most of us associate PSP with a handheld games device from Sony, but it also stands for Public Service Publishing. It is the latter connotation that I wish to explore, which some media professionals chose to call “the other PSP”.

In the last five years, radio and television have moved from being the dominant electronic media to a world also influenced by the Internet and mobiles. We are seeing the transition from media consumption to consuming, participating in and creating media. The creation process is not necessarily an individual endeavour; collective or social media are also play an increasingly important role. As a result the nature of media creation and use needs careful re-examination.

The growth in these social media brings with it a number of challenges.

- What constitutes quality?
- What is the role of expertise?
- To what extent can quality be managed collectively?
- What kind of organisational framework and business models should underpin such collective endeavours?

Social media	Examples
Wikis	Wikipedia, Citizendium, Knol
Social networking	Facebook and MySpace
Blogs and blog search engines	Engadget; technorati
Podcasting and podcatching	I-Tunes
Video sharing	YouTube, Joost
Photo sharing	Flickr, Photobucket and Snapfish
Virtual reality	Second Life
Social bookmarking	del.icio.us and StumbleUpon
Massively Multiplayer Online Games	Xiah (Korea), World of Warcraft (USA)