

for the Next Generation

‘audience’ i.e. for legacy media to continue with the status quo as there is no expectation for deep interaction e.g. my dad’s happy listening to talk-back radio and does not expect to be able to talk to his TV.

How should we address the needs of the next generation? Unlike Henry Ford, we should try asking them as we now have the technology to do so in a meaningful way.

2) Independence through Coordination Not Control

The most important lesson from the Internet revolution, from a policy perspective, is ‘don’t try to regulate what you can’t control’. This manifests itself in the policy space in global bodies such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (www.icann.org) that uses ‘bottom-up’ processes that foster coordination rather than ‘top-down’ control mechanisms.

This axiom can be applied to the discussion of RTHK’s Editorial ‘Independence’, a passionate area where there has been a tremendous investment in energy and views. This is laudable, however I believe that this ‘independence’ is better addressed by shifting the focus of the organisation from the production of content (i.e. ‘the product’) to coordinating its commissioning (i.e. ‘the process’).

Why? Because the creator is always ultimately responsible for the content. Given advances in technology, former ‘broadcast’ technologies such as video are all now readily available to individual creators (just ask your kids).

3) Relax: Quality if Relative

Some may grimace at the potential loss of editorial or quality control. I would argue that ‘quality’ is

relative to the users’ expectations. Specifically that the problem is not finding a platform from which to ‘speak’, but finding mechanisms that invites the audience to ‘engage’. Few tire to hear the sound of their own voice or the voices of those they care about ... on issues they care about.

4) Reuse – Recycle

In the digital age, copyright matters. RTHK should adopt and encourage copyright mechanisms which promote reuse and recycling of works funded by the public purse. Mechanisms such as ‘Creative Commons’. The recent establishment of the RTHK Creative Archive is a significant good start (www.rthk.org.hk/creativearchive).

5) Define Success: Take A System View

I think it imperative that the new RTHK defines how it will measure its ‘success’. Will it be measured by the number of media ‘pieces’ or ‘hours’ that it produces, by traditional metrics of viewership or coverage or by something entirely different (e.g. total blog posts linkbacks, total works coordinated or commissioned) etc.

I would argue that Hong Kong should take a system view and not consider RTHK in isolation. Isolation from the wider and more profound changes in education (e.g. introduction of Liberal Studies), in establishing new creative industries and capital (e.g. www.createhk.gov.hk) and in establishing a cultural centre (e.g. West Kowloon).

To me, its not a ‘hardware’ but a ‘software problem’ (e.g. what exactly are we going to perform in the West Kowloon Cultural District?) and success to me is measured by how readily accessible publicly funded works are by the public and

how readily accessible are the processes that led to their creation.

6) Real Risks: Voting with our Fingers, Thumbs or Feet?

In Hong Kong we don’t have democracy, but we are free. We are free thinker and talkers. We have Article 27 of the Basic Law and the risk of building RTHK 2.0, not 3.0, is that we alienate the very generation we require to further our success. If we fail, they will not only vote with their thumbs and fingers – they might decide to vote with their feet and we certainly don’t need another generation of ‘astronauts’.

Please submit your views to the Government. (<http://www.cedb.gov.hk/ctb/eng/psb/index.htm>)

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References:

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- * Creative Commons Hong Kong:
<http://hk.creativecommons.org/>



Building RTHK 3.0

It's 6 o'clock and by the warm glow of the 'wireless' the family regularly waits together to listen to the news and their favourite programme. Do you remember? Do you also remember the last time you all sat down together to watch the 'tube'?

I don't ... but my 83-year old father does! My kids think I'm referring to watching their 'youtube' videos on the iPod over the home 'wireless' network! How expectations have changed.

This 'next generation' expects to participate in a dialogue that is media agnostic, with professional and peer-produced content that is relevant to their lives: 'on demand, anywhere, any time'. They invest their attention to build relationship networks whose currencies are 'reputation' and 'trust'.

What then, is the importance and relevance to this 'iPod generation', of the 4th December deadline to the Government's consultation on the 'new' Radio Television Hong Kong i.e. how it should operate to fulfill its mission as a public service broadcaster?

'Radio and Television' or 'Reputation and Trust'?

If we frame RTHK's future in terms of 'Radio', or yet another 'Television' channel, if we throw in the 'lion rock' to raise revenue and declare victory by adding an 'e' for 'electronic' or 'I' for internet then RTHK's future is probably of no significance to them whatsoever. They already know how to vote with their thumbs, to change the channel, or their index fingers ... to click on something else.

To the next generation, the 'new' RTHK risks not being seen as relevant or important to their lives.

Something to surf past. Something that is politely ignored as it doesn't captivate their attention or aligned with their interests. Something passive that does not invite or require their active participation or stimulate action. Someone that they would not really consider working for.

If, however, we frame the issue in terms of how it could foster talent and creativity by serving as a neutral platform to coordinate processes that commission 'public works' (works produced and selected 'by the public'), whose copyright 'for the public' enables reuse, then this consultation is of tremendous, long-term significance. Why? Because it will be the means by which the next generation builds and celebrates its culture and creativity (see 'Remix' by Lawrence Lessig).

But isn't this a 20+ year old debate? Didn't the 2006 Committee on Review of Public Service Broadcasting look into this? Didn't their final March 2007 report mention the 'Internet' no more than once? Well ... yes!

Don't follow the Future: Invent it

Fortunately for Hong Kong, we never quite found the answer to winning the last war by looking in the rear-view mirror. We never quite found the answer to what would happen to part of our cultural heritage if RTHK, and its intellectual property, all went away.

Looking forward, what can we learn from existing media battles in print, radio and television – all under siege by the Internet and incessant innovations? What can we learn from its 'peer production' and 'user generated content' models? Does the next generation really need or want Henry Ford's 'faster horse', a slightly updated TV or Radio Channel?

Shouldn't we really position RTHK for 'flight' by daring to imagine the future?

I would argue for that latter by imagining something truly exciting when seen from eyes of the next generation. Something which causes them to seek ownership and engagement of its public service broadcaster. Something that puts them in a decision making role that enables and empowers them to find their voice. In other words, something already envisioned and described as 'Public Media 2.0'.

Although dated, this seminal paper by Jessica Clark, Director of the Future of Public Media Project, better frames the issues facing public service broadcasters than this short piece. I would encourage you all to take a moment to read and understand it.

Nevertheless, I summarize 6 points that I consider to be important when building the 'new' RTHK. This is to encourage you to make your own submission to the Government before December 4th.

From my perspective:

1) Forget Format

Discussions and distinctions between different media platforms and bandwidth (digital radio, television, mobile or fixed line Internet, broadcast, narrowcast, one-cast etc.) are interesting from a technical and regulatory perspective. However, when seen from the user perspective, they poorly frame the issue of how to engage their attention and thus can be seen as secondary considerations. Let the users control the 'format feed' and lets focus on how to encourage and retain their attention.

The implication is that RTHK should be media agnostic and use whatever platform best suits its