

Wrestling mobile media – at the speed of ‘now’

The rise of digital – and mobile – has left many analogue media owners and their associated ecosystems floundering. Throwing a moat around fading revenue streams might keep a finger in the dike, but sooner or later the industry is going to have to come to grips with this evolution, says Anice Hassim.

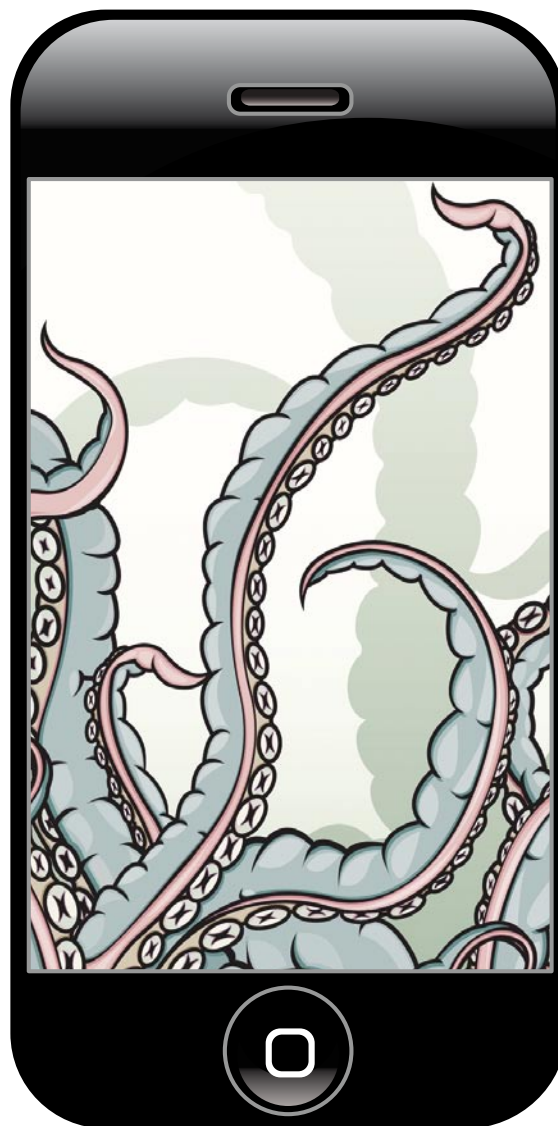
TACKLING MOBILE IS A BIT LIKE wrestling a slime-covered octopus in the dark. Wrestling a slime-covered octopus in the dark while your mother-in-law shouts advice from the bleachers and the board is screaming at you to put that 21-year-old in charge, is probably even closer to the truth.

The reality is that new media is a complex soup of ingredients that borrows heavily from traditional media for core competencies – but at the speed of “now” – and unless you can operate at that speed, the octopus is going to mean trouble.

Media owners who don't at least have a rudimentary version of their content on mobile are going to get hijacked by more nimble players who offer the same content, only faster.

In fact, the single most important factor to being successful in mobile is understanding the pace at which you have to move. Every important trend today is geared towards the manipulation of time, be it speeding it up or tossing it around.

The rise of Twitter is throwing a breaking-news mesh around the globe and accelerating the rise of a global consciousness. The equally ferocious rise of time-shifted content-on-demand means that consumers not only expect to



accelerate time, but to manipulate it as well.

The bulk of piracy is a direct consequence of traditional media's inability to understand the “lagging” issue.

For this reason, game and movie producers routinely have “day-date releases” – a simultaneous global release in all territories.

And it's going to hit television schedules next. All over Sleepy Hollow South Africa, ordinary families are watching hit sitcoms like “Modern Family” and “Cougar Town” long before local channels schedule them. Mostly, they are doing it not because they don't want to pay, but because they want it now – it's what all their friends are talking about; it's splashed all over the blogs they read.

On the mobile front, many applications have successfully dealt with the lagging issue: Applications such as Tweetie or CNN's allow consumers to dip into an information stream in real time without loading a whole website.

So, in mobile, online and all these new digital spaces, old media is still relevant – but you'll have to do it all faster.

That may sound like a tall enough order, but it's important to realise

TO PAGE 22 >>



case study

that a new generation of consumers are doing it effortlessly, deploying a “seventh sense”-like ability, to sift and find meaning in the information stream.

Traditional media owners and agencies wanting to take on this space need to consider the demands of real-time delivery and gear every part of their business accordingly.

To do this, they need a strong infrastructure capacity. Even if they have to partner to get it initially, it's essential to at least develop an understanding of the nuts and bolts of the medium. Many agencies try to do digital by avoiding the geeks – but you can't do digital without them.

A strong, multi-disciplinary team of designers and programmers, creatives and engineers will ensure a balance between effective exploitation of mobile or online without the excesses of overlavish design or opaque usability. That way, the geeks remind the creatives of the fragility of the servers, pipes and platforms they are working in and the creatives remind the geeks that we are talking to real people on the other end.

It is also important to understand the investment that is required to operate in real time: A successful digital campaign will always budget enough resources to respond rapidly.

Digital and mobile media evolve so quickly that it's best not to worry about trying to figure out the next hot trend – work with what the audience is doing right now.

Many underestimate the resources required for interactivity. A digital or mobile campaign requires someone to be “home” while the campaign is happening to deal with queries, load stresses, glitches and complaints. The better you choreograph these, the better the outcome of your campaign, and – more importantly – the better the outcome of your next campaign will be, since authenticity and trust are crucial in this space.

It's key to find the right people, grow them and – most challenging of all – keep them. “Old media” is still relevant precisely because it has the right people (writers, photographers and the like). Until that changes, it holds the keys to the kingdom because it's ultimately responsible for our content and that will, forever and a day, be king. ■

Mobilising online

Digital agency Prezence South Africa was recently tasked with deploying the music and entertainment site EntertainmentAfrica.com into the mobile space. Tim Bishop explains the challenges.

The site

EntertainmentAfrica.com is a guide to local and worldwide music, movies and entertainment. An average of 50 new stories and features are published daily.

Why mobilise?

The growing number of South Africans who access the internet using their cellphones presented the site with a large untapped audience. The nature of the content appeals especially to the youth, who are increasingly accessing their information on the go via their mobile handsets.

The approach

It is a misconception that mobile sites have to be cut-down versions of their online counterparts. Comprehensive mobisites can be developed to easily rival their online counterparts.

The biggest challenge in developing a comprehensive mobi version of a well-known online publishing property is the need for making the mobile version a recognisable brand experience within the constraints of the smaller browser size and the limited navigation tools available on a cellphone.

The existing personality, flavour and flow of the online counterpart should be taken into account, so as to provide a seamless transition for any user. The similarities between the two properties need to be a lot more sophisticated than simple design cues, so it was important when developing EntertainmentAfrica.mobi that the structure and user flow of the site's comprehensive features were retained. Natural content relationships, search and “you might like” functions within the music, movies, games, gadgets and events sections also needed to be applied to the mobi version within very limited screen real estate.

The approach to mobisite and user-

experience design followed here is similar to how someone might organise themselves at a very small desk. First, we ensure that the essentials such as their “screen and keyboard” are directly accessible in front of them. Then we make sure that their “coffee cup”, “phone” and “pen” are close to hand. From there we work outwards in circular zones, with the lesser used items still reachable but on the periphery – always ensuring that the user's workspace is kept tidy.

Adding to the challenge of mobile development is the fact that there are currently over 5,500 mobile handsets in the market, each with a variety of features, capabilities and a multitude of possible screen sizes. Handset Content Adaptation is the next most important layer in the development process. This specialised methodology enables us to render infinite different versions of the mobisite in order to display perfectly on the individual user's handset regardless of screen size or phone capability.

An enhanced offering

EntertainmentAfrica.mobi has now opened up to a potential 12-million more South African users, a figure that is growing rapidly.

The mobisite and its content is available as a full “white-label” service: Brands wishing to integrate the content onto their own portals and under their own branding can do so with ease.

The future

The ability for streaming music and video to be played via Entertainment Africa.mobi across a variety of compatible handsets exists and will be deployed after permission is granted from the respective content owners. Comprehensive Customer Relationship Management (CRM) profiling tools will also be plugged in shortly. ■