

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The State of the Digital Media World 2019

Catherine Clinch · Wednesday, February 13th, 2019

At a time when so many of the tech publishers are downsizing, Digital Entertainment World 2019 shifted their focus onto what's good about online content and technology. From that perspective, a 2-day journey into positive opportunities emerged and the flow of ideas between panelists and conference attendees was inspiring.

Ned Sherman, Partner at Manatt Digital—who runs the DEW conference with his wife, Tinzar—launched Day One by showing how numbers are leading us to a new future of video consumption. There are 495 scripted TV series this year—with more of them running on streaming services than broadcast television or cable. It also has to be noted that the traditional broadcasters are also expanding their business models to include streaming services. This has created a shift in video consumption that is pushing the major streaming services to put tens of billions of dollars into original productions in the next five years, resulting in what Sherman calls “an arms race.” But the most important thing Sherman said—which has been the most undiscussed element of streaming video—is that creatives need to think about the deals they will be making in this new distribution equation. The streamers want to buy out all of your rights without offering a backend participation, thereby relegating the content creators to the subservient position of service provider. Sherman encourages content creators to retain some rights so that they can share in the ownership. He also stresses the importance of creating a trusted metrics system so that content creators can participate in a reliable measurement of audience consumption of their products.

A number of trends worth noting were explored throughout the conference.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will emerge with multiple use case scenarios. In the area of metrics, IBM Watson is being used to auto-tag content to measure how it's being talked about, how it's being used and how the emotional engagement is working. But IBM is taking it one step further by using machine learning to start drawing inferences about totality of the world as one. The goal is for the machine to understand our feelings, our desires and our history so that it can predict what we will like next. A simple example of this would be an extension of the Netflix recommendation system. A more complex (and slightly creepy) development would be for Alexa to sense your mood when you enter the room and offer appropriate music, lighting, sounds or programming to either lift you up or mellow you out.

Branded entertainment is going to follow in the footsteps of Red Bull Media—where a product company transcends the boundaries of consumer packaged goods (CPG) to become a media company. An excellent example of this is the way that CNN has expanded the use of its news

production capabilities to create inspiring branded content through its Turner Ignite division. Once the content exists, the company has 52 touch-points that they can leverage to spread the content. Then they tailor all of their research to measure the emotional resonance of the content so they can demonstrate that it leads to results.

While it is extremely hard to launch a consumer facing brand, smaller content publishers can emerge from beneath the shadow of a larger publisher that incubates it. The example of Tasty may be one of the most inspiring. The overhead shots of ingredients being prepared was designed to show the most natural point of view of someone who would be watching to learn how to prepare a specific food item. Ashley McCollum, General Manager of Tasty began the site with a simple challenge: could she launch a page/brand that wasn't connected to BuzzFeed? She started the experiment 3-1/2 years ago. Sensing success early on, she launched a consumer products division and built a show on YouTube that included a talent program. They were forced to make innovations quickly because the competition was tough, so they had to be faster. Their ability to be agile in this area was supported by the fact that everything at Buzz Feed begins with the assumption of mobile. This requires understanding what the mobile version of anything will look and how it will operate before even considering a desktop iteration. The results speak for themselves. Tasty now reaches 500 million monthly viewers.

Omni-Culturalism is emerging as the next wave of diversity. Linda Ong, Chief Culture Officer at CIVIC Entertainment Group offered an excellent explanation of the history of diversity. The first wave featured the view of a populist (white) majority in which everybody else was categorized as the OTHER—racially, economically and geographically. Other-ing became a patterning of segregation. The second wave is assimilation—virtual white-washing—where in order to succeed in the world you have to become like the populist majority. The third wave of multi-culturalism emerged as a function of the census with the element of representation. Ultimately, we are transitioning into an understanding of omni-culturalism where everybody is different for a different reason and everybody is an expert at something. Ultimately, that makes us all the same. Simply stated: multi-culturalism is inviting someone to the party, while omni-culturalism is asking them to dance.

The new horizon of content marketing is a return to the in-person experience. Ms. Russell Aarons (former SVP and General Manager of Machinima who is now working under the banner of the ATT/Warner Bros merger) asserted that if you don't have something that is entirely relevant and pinpointed to an audience, you don't have anything. Using the examples of Comic Con and Vid Con, she suggests that the in-person experiential event enables people to find their communities in person. "We can't lose the idea that there is still something magical to the experiential event." She believes that gaming IP will become what comic books have been in the past and will have a huge impact on what is next to come. Her position is supported by a NewZoo Data report which determined that in 2018 gaming was responsible for more than half the revenue of all the events in the world. At this point, the wise have already started following eSports as a multi-platform revenue driver that includes live events.

All things considered, Digital Entertainment World is a conference where speakers are clearly chosen for their intellectual contribution to the understanding of emerging topics in a rapidly changing digital environment. Digital Media Wire owns and produces DEW as well as a number of other events. Find out more at: <https://dmwmedia.com/events/>

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