

Profile - Andrew Chitty

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When he was a TV producer, Andrew Chitty created programmes like *The Net*, the series that looked at the potential of new media. Now he finds himself embroiled in issues at the heart of the digital content production industry.

As vice-chair (interactive) of PACT, he's worried about the commercial fallout from the BBC Trust's decision to shut down BBC Jam, the Corporation's online education initiative, formerly known as the digital curriculum. Having set up Illumina Digital in 1998 to exploit the e-learning sector, Chitty has been closely following the development and recent demise of the project.

He believes that the BBC Trust, which took over from the BBC Board of Governors earlier this year, made the right decision. But he estimates that the suspension of BBC Jam could cost the new media industry £20-30m, as well as further revenue from rights ownership.

"There's a worry over the tens of millions of pounds' worth of content that has been commissioned and which may not be used," says Chitty. "The Trust has inherited a mess, but it will have a review to get it right and use the new regulatory framework available through the public value test to launch a service that has clarity."

At the moment Chitty, with his PACT hat on, is seeking further clarity on this issue from the BBC, but believes that a phoenix from the ashes of BBC Jam could be even more valuable.

"BBC Jam helped to grow the interactive content sector," he says. "So it might be a good move for the BBC to suggest commissioning the whole thing out next time to independents and just retain strategy and commissioning. Then it might get value for money and innovation."

Chitty has also been getting his teeth stuck into the gradual convergence of the TV and online markets and what this means for independent new media production companies. Central to this issue has been his work with PACT to create a set of frameworks with the BBC that will give digital content creators parity with TV production companies over ownership.

These frameworks are aimed at original online content creators and cover the development of applications. Chitty is convinced the frameworks, once they're agreed with the BBC and other broadcasters, will give the sector a boost, but says that the biggest opportunity is to take the model and apply it to industries outside broadcast.

"Under the framework, online content creators have the rights over their material just as indies do in TV, but the other big win is that these rights can be taken out of the broadcast sector entirely," he says. "There has been a huge growth in public sector new media and we will have a model that works with the BBC that can be applied to that market and beyond."

Illumina's latest project with the BBC, online interactive teen drama *Wannabes*, is in the middle of its run. Chitty took the opportunity during the negotiations between the BBC and PACT to structure a deal that retains Illumina's rights to the project. "The model is a bit different as we'll keep the core interactive format but remake all the content that runs through it," he says. "We are also talking to BBC Worldwide and several production companies in the US. This new framework will create a viable secondary market for our industry; it's not the same as the secondary market in TV as ours is smaller, but it gives us the ability to resell our work."

Chitty believes that broadcasters have a lot to learn about the marketing of interactive content and must push people towards these new experiences. "I'm sure the BBC could have done more for *Wannabes*, but it's very hard for it as it's a big machine," he says. "These things may be interesting to us, but they're not three-year £8m productions. Whether it's *Wannabes* or *Signs of Life* - the new £800,000 Endemol online teen drama commissioned by the BBC - you'll only see if it works as a high audience-level phenomenon if you make the audience aware of it."

However, Chitty is buoyant about the future of 360-degree commissioning in the UK, believing that over the next 18 months there will be a strengthening of the new media production sector that will increasingly converge with traditional TV production. "TV people understand how viewers view things and we understand how users use things. But they're two separate skills, so although it may be the same person, they're in different modes," he says.

Chitty believes that within the independent TV production market, there's a growing awareness that companies need to understand digital, even as the sector focuses on the bottom line and core formats. However, the BBC's focus on commissioning multi-platform work is producing a series of challenges.

"Some indies have new media experience, some don't think it's too hard to acquire and others will look at partnerships with new media specialists like us," explains Chitty.

On top of all this he's also trying to plan the development of a public service publisher (PSP), which recently sent out a consultation document through Ofcom. Chitty says there has been a positive response and believes it will bring together a core of interested parties who want to make it happen, but that the clock is ticking.

"We now have a timeline working back from 2010 or 2011. If you need to have this thing up and running by then, you need to have a legislative programme. Ofcom can't do that, so if you allot two years for it, that leaves only the next 18 months to flesh out the ideas."

Chitty is still hungry for success with Illumina and his appetite for innovation in the interactive content production sector is yet to be sated. With plenty of challenges left for him, from PACT to the PSP, the interactive content industry will be influenced by his thoughts for some time to come.

CV

Name

Andrew Chitty

Title MD, Illumina Digital

Age 44

Education 1984: Physiology and Anatomy BSc, University College London; 1984-87; Research in visual AI, Psychological Laboratory, University of St Andrews; 1987-88: Postgrad Certificate in Radio Film and TV, Drama Department, Bristol University

Career 1987-90: Production roles, Wall to Wall TV; 1990-93: Producer for educational TV and software, Granada TV; 1993-96: Producer and director; 1996-98: Editor and series producer, Illuminations TV; 1998-present: MD, Illumina Digital; 2006-present: Vice-chair (interactive), PACT