Make / Receive: The New Broadcast.

Abstract
The world we live in is changing quickly. The convergence of new technologies and services underpinned by a robust and distributed digital infrastructure acts as both response and stimulus to the needs and desires of people and their expectations of Digital Media.

Our belief is that the current convergence of technologies will give rise to a new kind of interaction with the internet, one that moves beyond the confines of screen, that enables richer, more pleasurable and more meaningful ways of interacting with internet data and services.

The concept of Broadcasting is being shaped and redefined by both convergence and users responses to it. Makers capture through Smartphones, game play and GoogleGlass broadcasting via YouTube, or narrowcasting micro-stories, via Vine and Instagram. Receivers, listen and watch catch-up on phones and tablets, consoles, smart TV’s and laptops, and create their own channels of Maker content, creating new viewing behaviours free from the tyranny of the TV Guide.

Receivers
Since the introduction of Radio, home entertainment technology has evolved to create a series of mutually exclusive platforms. We propose that with convergence the channels are arguably less important than the platforms. The distinctions we make between television or radio and the web are anachronistic, what differs is how we choose to engage with them.

Receivers engage with media through five key platforms:
Speaker (shared audio experience)
Headphone (personal audio experience)
Large Screen (shared audiovisual experiences)
Small Screen (personal experiences)
Second Screen (complementary / personal experiences)

These platforms are complementary; we ascertain that the success of one platform does not necessitate the failure of another. A short term drop in radio sales does not reflect a failure of the platform, rather it represents a failure of both manufacturers and broadcasters to establish what the platform does better than the others, to appreciate how it can be enhanced through convergence and to then capitalise on this.

We want to rethink the knobs and dials, the newspapers and TV guides, to better understand how to adapt the platform to the media.

Makers
The most significant shift in recent behaviour is the rise of social media sharing enabled directly by apps such as YouTube, SoundCloud and Instagram and facilitated by social media apps such as Facebook and Twitter. The sheer speed with which these apps are growing driven by the ease of engagement, points to a genuine shift in behaviour – SoundCloud launched in 2007, in 2013 the company has over 38million registered users reaching an audience of 180 million listeners each month.

We propose that hardware makers and traditional media companies have failed to capitalise on the growth of such apps and the rise of communities of content-creating Makers. There is a clear opportunity to create Internet enabled objects that facilitate the creation and sharing of ‘broadcast’ media. For the BBC this represents a clear expression of its purpose to promote education and learning and to stimulate creativity and cultural excellence. It shouldn’t just create content it should support the creation and sharing of content, creating an infrastructure for Makers.
Engagement

The development of the Smartphone and an app based service model has led to a step change in both our perception and use of the Internet. By moving from a browser-based system to a native app based system we are making the Internet invisible. In doing so we ascertain that people will become more reliant on a self-imposed system of information organisation – the selection of specific apps, featuring favoured GUI's and behaviours, and the personalised and thematic grouping of such apps.

Above and beyond the opportunities highlighted above we think there is a significant opportunity to rethink the way that we organise, store, retrieve and share digital media through the development of Physical Apps, that enable users to engage with digital content via physical objects. Our current screen-based interfaces are reductive – a singular way to experience a vast variety of media and information, we don’t think the future will be neat like this. Physical Apps are forerunners to a maximalist internet, where we can pick and choose the kind of simple (or indeed complex and elaborate) interactions we want to have with data, services and each other and the objects that will deliver these.

To this end we created the Postcard Player, The Postcard Player is a prototype that shows how we could use Paper Electronics to listen to digital music, or interact with other data and services in a more engaging way.

People can put a specially printed postcard into the player and press the buttons printed on it to hear a piece of music. The cards are screen-printed using conductive inks and have no electronic components in them. When they are put in the player they act like switches that tell it what tracks to play. The experience combines the analogue spirit of vinyl records and music cassettes with the tactility of paper and print to create a new way to interact with digital data.

The Postcard Player is a platform for experimentation rather than a finished idea. Previous versions of the Postcard Player have connected to cloud based content, turning the postcards into physical versions of a digital bookmarks. Placing one card in the player will play live radio; another will play the most popular tracks on SoundCloud and so on. The current version of the Player plays local content but feedback user interaction to the cloud enabling a second screen interaction with the device.

The creative challenge is in how to rethink and express these interactions. As we create new products, behaviours, systems and services we must recognise that we need to create a sense of understanding of these new things. One approach to this is employing Product Semantics, such as affordance and metaphor, to better enable users to understand a product’s likely purpose and behaviours. We have developed a simple approach around which to codify the semantics of existing products, we propose that this can act as a framework for the development of new product forms and behaviours, and in doing so drive new interactions.

Bio

Uniform is a leading UK creative agency. Established in 1998 the company employs 30 people and works with clients including Bacardi, Westfield, The FA, Foster & Partners, Glen Dimplex, Unilever and Shop Direct.

The agency’s Postcard Player was recently nominated for the Design Museum’s Designs of the Year exhibition that annually showcases a peer-reviewed selection of the world’s best design. Most recently it won two Big Chip Awards: The Big Chip Imagination Award and The Anthony Wilson Original Modern Award.

Previous projects such as SweetTweet (a twitter enabled cuckoo clock that dispenses sweets when the agency receives new followers) and The Listening Post (a paper poster that uses conductive ink to enable users to listen to music by touching the poster) have had international acclaim.

Uniform has won more than 100 awards and consistently appears in the Design Week Top 100 Consultancy Survey that lists the UK’s most successful Design Agencies. In 2011 and 2012 Uniform was awarded the title of ‘Design Consultancy of the Year’ at the MI Awards.
Pete Thomas is a founder of the company and its Futures Director. He oversees a broad portfolio of research, design and innovation projects that consider how design and technology can create meaningful conversations between the people who own brands and the people who engage with them.

His work is driven by a balance of being excited by people’s needs and desires and by new and emergent digital technology. At the heart of both these approaches is the urge to uncover new insights that allow new stories to be told.

In addition to his work at Uniform, Pete lectures on Design throughout the UK and has held lecturing positions with the Universities of Salford, Leeds and Dundee. He is currently a visiting lecturer on the MSc Digital Product Design programme at the University of Dundee. In 2011 he presented a paper at the 13th International Conference on Engineering and Product Design Education entitled ‘Products that tell stories: the use of Semantics in the development and understanding of future products’ which described an approach for the development of design narratives that assist users in addressing the challenge of how to conceptualise and interact with new products types.

He recently co-founded Fieldguide, an occasional collective and sometimes journal for people interested in design, technology and society and the intersections where they overlap. He is the designer and co-editor of the publication and has recently completed the third edition that featured contributions from leading academics, writers, journalists, designers and NASA! He also writes for other publications and most recently has had articles published in Digital Arts and Creative Review.

Pete has been invited to present his work Internationally at a variety of conferences and exhibitions and events such as: The Royal College of Art, London; Il Compasso di Latta, La Triennale di Milano; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; SXSW, Austin Texas; Future Everything, Manchester; and the London Design Festival.