

BRANDED ENTERTAINMENT

Distributed Storytelling in a Digital World

By Troy Hitch
and Doug Worple

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Digital advertising has created a new breed of media consumer. They have an incredibly high standards and strong opinions. They are immune to traditional advertising because they don't want their content to be interrupted. They no longer think in terms of TV or movies or channels or formats. They want to be entertained

anywhere – where, when and how it suits them best. They want to engage in something they can talk about. They want to share something that, in the very act of sharing, makes them feel like they are. They want to discuss it, change it, mark it, make it their own. They are not just consumers; they are participants. Entertainment is no longer a passive activity; it's an

Every day of sponsored radio and TV programs, the Brand has successfully leveraged entertainment to deliver its consumer message. *But leveraging entertainment to reach today's media consumer has required the Brand to assume a new role.* Seeking a new connection with its audience, the Brand has taken on the role of the storyteller, the studio, the producer, as referenced in our previous report. The result is an entertainment experience that engages the Brand's audience in a more relevant and meaningful than ever before.

This white paper examines the new face of branded entertainment, the importance of great storytelling, the roles the Brand can play in the entertainment experience and best practices for using new media to distribute the story.

tain advertising, there
experience. Consumers
an emotional impact and *when*
tainment or social currency. When
back for more. Again and again. If that
is along with them. If executed responsibly,
ins with a great story.

THE PIXAR R

Finally, put the story and characters into a believable world.

ration, or audience target, a commitment to these rules
vice success for Pixar. There is no exception to the
to branded entertainment.

ning: the Consumer wonders "what
nce. For the Brand, this can result in
perience.

When the C... situation, she is much more likely to
connect with the... meaningful way. In the context of the Brand, the character
can establish a relevance and pathos that gives the Consumer the sensation that "*they get
me.*"

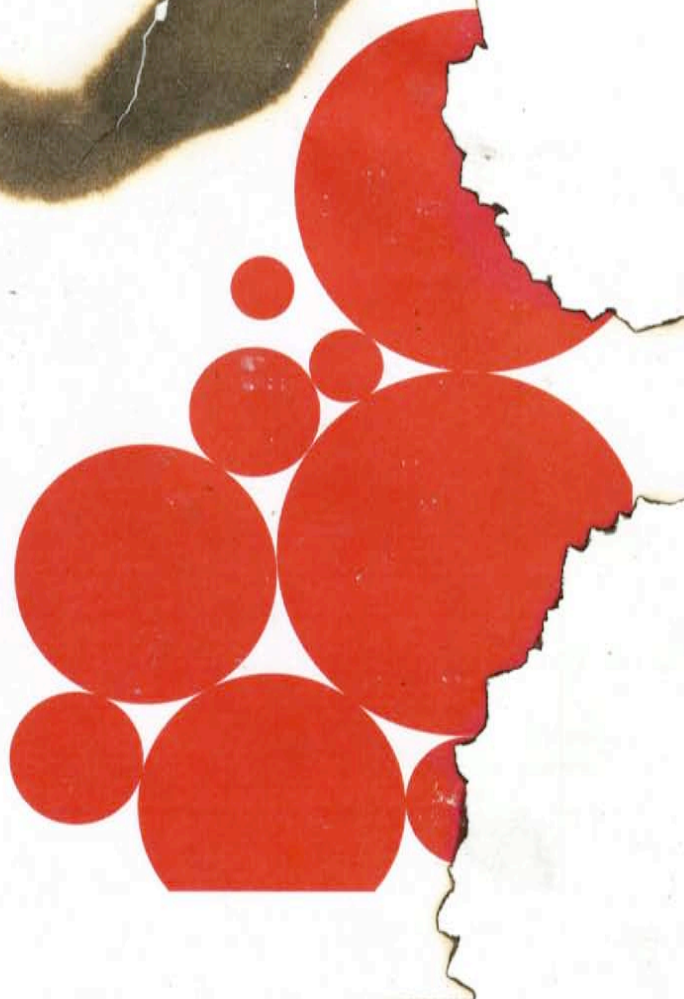
A believable world or immersive environment provides the Consumer with new and
impactful ways to engage in the story. The Brand deploys its story in the new media
universe, and the number of touchpoints becomes infinite.

It doesn't ne... eping epic – a great story can be told in
thirty sec... about creating drama and a
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resulting experience can
truly be dramatic.



THE ROLES OF THE BRAND AND THE CONSUMER

It's vital to identify the roles that both the Brand and the Consumer play in the branded entertainment experience. If possible, the Brand's role should be a driving force in developing and producing the idea. The following role definitions are broad and it's assumed that, from concept to execution, the roles will be unique to the particular circumstances.



Branded Sponsor

This is the least invasive way the Brand can promote the consumer entertainment experience. The Proud Sponsor's "brought to you by" tag has been around as long as entertainers have been funded. But just as entertainment media has evolved from radio to TV to Internet, so too has sponsorship. The proliferation of cable networks and online programming has broadened the spectrum of content sponsorship options, allowing Brands to engage targeted audiences with relevant content. Branded entertainment in the digital space offers even more opportunities for the Brand to strengthen its position with the consumer by the Consumer

IS M... FELICIA DAY'S "THE GUILD"

The first season of the series was originally launched as a parody of sponsorship, but after gaining a sizable audience and because of its spot-on parody of online gaming, it was a perfect fit for Microsoft to promote its many new media platforms. Season Two premiered on Xbox Live, MSNVideo, the Zune mobile platform and other proprietary Microsoft venues, delivering millions of views, downloads and subscribers. Microsoft was also able to use the show to attract other sponsors and to attract other sponsors. The show's success allowed Microsoft to be featured for upfront (a rare honor in web video.) Most importantly, the show's identity presence is now a permanent fixture since itself—a sign of a dedicated audience.

The second and third seasons of "The Guild"



While the series certainly generated successful business results, the return on investment for Microsoft is the goodwill generated for supporting and sustaining a beloved entertainment property.

as Lead Character

in which the Brand plays a character is particularly challenging to branded entertainment. Unless the Brand is integrated in a way that is immediately believable, accepted and embraced by the audience, the whole thing can stink of advertising and may be perceived as one big, long commercial. One of the misconceptions is that the Brand needs to solve a problem or "save the day." While the Brand can sometimes play the part of "hero," the role of *Lead Character* simply means that the Brand's participation is fundamental to the story telling.

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO ENSURE THE INTEGRITY OF THE BRAND AND EARN THE RESPECT OF THE AUDIENCE

In the case of Illeana D'Amore's "Easy to Assemble" series, benefactor Illeana and the brand's integration in the walls of their home is natural and seamless. Most importantly, Illeana and her team as a sponsor, further engage in truthful observations about the Ikea experience – favorable, sometimes satirical – that make the integration that much more authentic.



Illeana D'Amore, "Easy to Assemble"

The Brand as Sh...nspirator

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THE OTHER EQUAL PARTNER IN THE CREATION OF A BRANDED EXPERIENCE IS THE CONSUMER

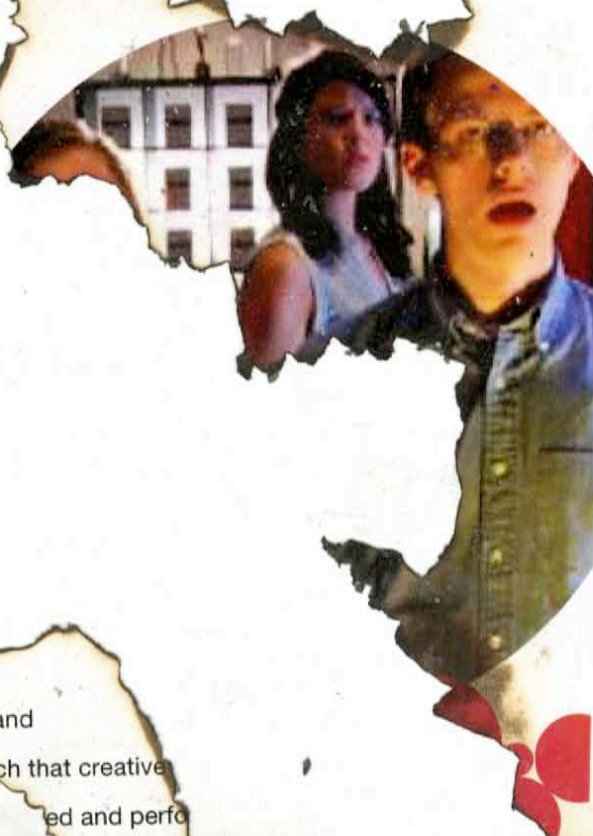
In a digital age saturated with devices and technologies that enable new forms of active participation including chatting, sharing, self-publishing and more, it's not surprising to discover that the majority of branded experiences are passive viewing. But, it's an important point to much more active involvement, and so it's highly important in a property be of utmost storytelling quality. The consumer is not just a number; she has a great deal of power. She has the power to choose how much or how little to watch. She has the power to rate, to vote, to "like." And most importantly, she has the power to share. The fate of a property is in the hands of the consumers, and that's a mighty power to wield.

The Consumer as Contributor

The moment the Consumer shares her experience of content, she has become a Contributor. And her act of passing the experience along to a friend in an email or postcard or social media wall actually changes the content itself. Her impression of the experience and sets the context for which they will be shared. In a Branded Experience, the Consumer's embrace of the experience is more and more valuable. Her comments on a video, her dialogue with one of the characters on Twitter, her vote for a story or a clip, her up of video clips – all forms of personal expression that, simultaneously, enrich the greater entertainment experience. And when guided and rewarded by the brand, the Contributor becomes even more powerful.

The Consumer as Champion

If the brand's message is compelling, Consumers can become so inspired or incentivized to participate that they become *Champions* and may even begin doing



med to the audience. S... from a



...s interacted with Sienna and other users, submitted creations
...ere featured in subsequent episodes of the ... and spread the word
...rums. Not a contest. Not a sweepstakes. ... a chance for eager
viewers to earn a little social currency and become a part of the story.

The Consumer is an independent player in the experience, and her role is
defined not by the Brand's actions. However, the Brand can
create touchpoints that ... to influence the choices the
Consumer makes ... a more meaningful role.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Understanding of the Consumer and the role of a great story and the roles
the Consumer play in our lives, we can begin to answer
the most important question: What's in it for me?

The value of entertainment needs to be symbiotic, and it's often
most helpful when it comes through the Consumer. An effective branded
entertainment experience will allow the Brand to deliver the message for the
Consumer.

Entertainment

"I laughed." Or "I just had my socks knocked off." It's a quality
entertainment experience, and the Consumer appreciates that it was delivered
by the Brand.

Emotion

"I cared". The experience was highly relevant to the Consumer. She has a reason to
watch it—and the Brand makes a deeper connection with the Consumer because she
thinks "they really get me."

Knowledge

"I learned." The Consumer gets a real, tangible learning experience.
This is not necessarily a tutorial or course as the Consumer can be something as
simple as "Wow, I didn't realize the band had released a new album."

These components create a high value quotient for the Brand. A great
story is the foundation for the Brand to achieve its goals. Three ingredients
— entertainment, emotion, and knowledge — are blended to create the most
effective experience.

THE EVOLUTION OF STORYTELLING TO A DISTRIBUTED MODEL

It's difficult to broadly define branded entertainment in the interactive space for several reasons. First, the migration of entertainment companies from the bosom of broadcast to the wild west of the internet has been rocky to say the least. Struggling to understand what the web video-watching market will bear, media giants have created hit-or-miss business models, most of which have been misses culminating in repurposed TV and movie content wrapped in very old media advertising packages.

Second, the concept of "content" is evolving at an incredible rate. The broadcast model continues to erode as TV owners abandon appointment viewing and watching what they want when they want with DVRs and internet-connected set-top boxes. But many digitally savvy consumers have foregone the "TV experience" altogether, turning to their computers, iPods, iPads, and mobile phones to watch shorter-form content in places and times that better suit their increasingly busy lives. These people, though completely dissatisfied with the passive and cumbersome experience of viewing content, still seek entertainment; of course, it's just that it's in a different form – video games, location-based mobile apps, even Twitter feeds, Facebook walls and Flickr streams.

The evolution of the entertainment business to compete in the interactive business of entertainment. While most entertainment companies still search for the silver bullet business model for content on the web, many brands have discovered a different "ROI" and, as such, have the distinct advantage of looking at interactive channels from a different perspective. The Brand doesn't necessarily need to realize revenue from its entertainment property – in fact, a paid model may be counterintuitive to its purpose. In many cases, the real return for a Brand is simply quality exposure with the right people and greater potential for loyalty.

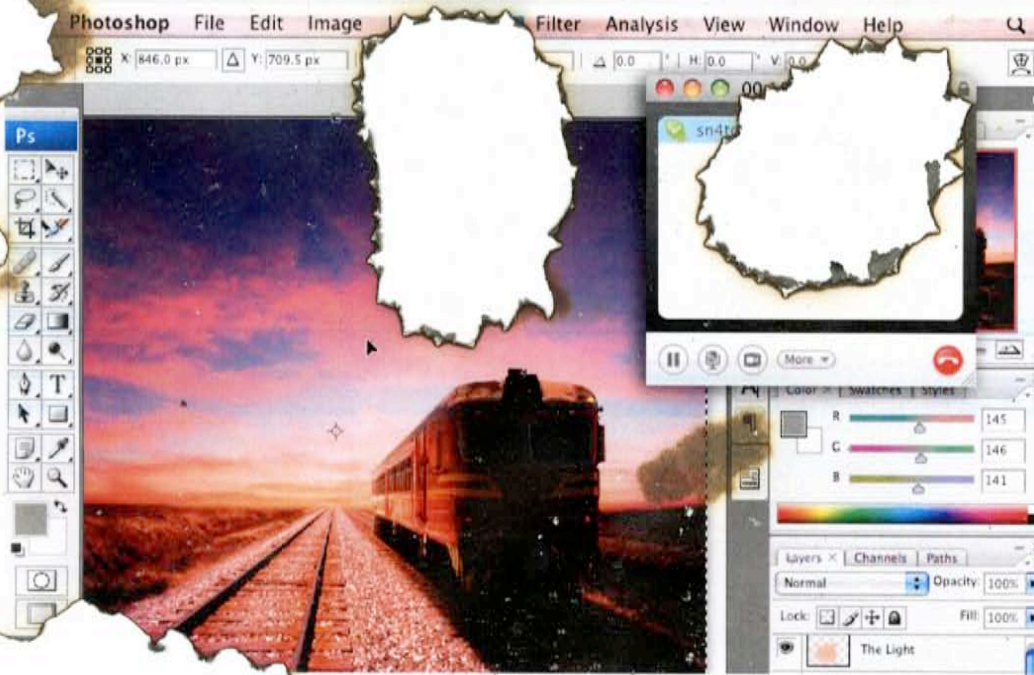
Distributed Storytelling Case Study

YOU SUCK AT PHOTOSHOP

In early 2008, a video created by this document's author Troy Hitch entitled "You Suck at Photoshop" made a splash on Digg.com, spearheading what would become a web video phenomenon: two seasons, twenty episodes, three Webby awards, one of Time Magazine's Top 10 TV Episodes of 2008 and nearly 30 million views later, "You Suck At Photoshop" is considered one of the most original and inventive digital entertainment experiences of all time. What made this seemingly disposable mock tutorial series last? It all started with a character named Donnie Hoyle.

DONNIE HOYLE TEACHES YOU HOW TO USE PHOTOSHOP BECAUSE HE'S BETTER THAN YOU. AND BECAUSE PHOTOSHOP IS THE ONLY WAY HE CAN EXPRESS HIMSELF. AND IF HE DOESN'T VENT ABOUT HIS FAILING MARRIAGE TO AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE, HIS DEAD-END JOB, HIS HIRSUITE FACEBOOK STALKER, HIS WORLD OF WARCRAFT GUILD AND HIS PROBLEMS WITH FERTILITY, THEN HOW WILL YOU EVER GET ANY BETTER AT PHOTOSHOP?

This simple character became the focal point of an epic story: an everyman who is crumbling around him – and who's powerless to do anything about it – who's on a crash course with destiny. In Season One, Donnie reluctantly agrees to dissolve his marriage to his unfaithful wife only to slip into another disastrous relationship. In a desperate attempt to leave his miserable world behind, Donnie uses Photoshop's vanishing point tool to remove himself from existence. Season Two followed a similar plot: failing to prove that he is too infertile to have impregnated his ex-wife, Donnie engenders a series of unfortunate events causing even more chaos in his life. When Donnie finally decides to take control of his life, he discovers that the only way to truly escape his world is to master Photoshop.



ated entertainment experience. Inspired by the
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 And when viewers discovered
 it, they were surprised but I actually learned
 something about Photoshop too. WTF?" Its ab
 one part of the series' unique approach. "You Suc
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 The viewer never sees any of the character
 is told in voiceover,
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 " episodes are a
 compelling storytelling exp But there is a lot more

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 became a transmedia darling a success.

SENCE

When the video reached critical mass, in the comments on YouTube began to turn to the identity of the person who said that Donnie was a real, albeit screwed up, person. People who used Photoshop and hoping to become web famous were being voiced by a celebrity, the comedian and actor Donnie Cook in a comedy series that happened to use Photoshop as a background.



AGED ON, EXACTLY THE FACT THAT IN DONNIE HAD THE COOK IN HIS DONNIE (UCERS) NOT ONLY THE THOUSANDS OF CONVERSATIONS THAT WERE GOING AROUND THE VIDEOS, BUT ACTUALLY TO THEM IN A WAY THAT ONLY INTRIGUE.



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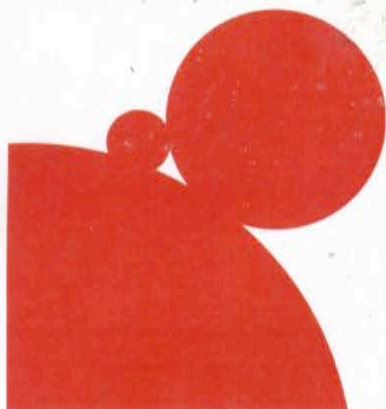
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OTHER VIRTUAL THEATRES

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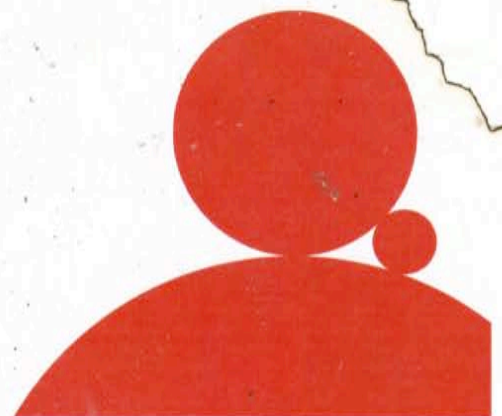
and would engage n

fans. It's clearly not a

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and thousands more views from new fans

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...the audience could ... explored new
way ... contributory participation. The ... Donnie working
with a photo of a sperm (which he named "Ronnie") ... fertility. In the
following episode, Donnie
opens by warning that some
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his photo of ...
defaced photo
over the web ...
through a p ...
that's been victimized as proof
and then, in an effort to stem
any further digital vandalism,
commands "Please don't
download Ronnie. Dot com."

...curious users navigate





The series that defined the mockutorial genre and pushed the limits of branded storytelling ended in the ultimate salute to its audience: a direct response to viewer feedback from the very first episode.

THE AGENCY/ STUDIO HYBRID

This new digital landscape of branded entertainment that's driven brands to serve as content creators, producers, and distributors has required agencies to review their business model as well. Still trying to manage the universal shift to "digital," many agencies are uncertain about what role they should, or can, play in delivering a successful branded entertainment experience to clients. At Proximity, we

we believe the secret to delivering unique and effective branded entertainment is to partner with the brand, together, foster its development from start to finish. To that end, our agencies are evolving. In some offices, we've employed a hybrid agency/studio model that allows us to understand the Brand's need and develop a strategy as their advertising agency, but also create and deploy the original intellectual property as the film studio. We've combined this approach by staffing a full-time branded entertainment specialist, hiring winning filmmakers, writers, producers, and technicians who also have extensive experience as advertising creatives and who, ultimately, are able to create work that serves the story and the Brand.

ING THE NEXT STEP

Perhaps you and your Brand have begun to explore the
entertainment strategy or currently seek to integrate a
experience into
ed? Please contact
ximity Branded

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



TROY HITCH is a creative director at Barefoot Proximity and leads the branded entertainment practice. As the founder of new media studio Big Fat Brain, he created the hit series "You Suck At Photoshop" and the breakout branded entertainment successes TIBCO's "Greg the Architect," Adobe Systems' "Agency of Record," Autodesk's "Teknochronicles of Z," among others. Troy is a three time Webby Award-winner, and his work has been featured in *Time*, *Wired*, *The Washington Post* and *The LA Times*. He can be reached at thitch@barefootproximity.com



DOUG WORPLE is the founder and CEO of Barefoot Proximity and the chief architect of the firm's transition from a traditional agency model to one focused on content. He identified the white space opportunity for the firm's ManOfTheHouse.com property and several other content plays now in development. He has earned many creative honors and has been featured in *Fast Company*, *Advertising Age* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He can be reached at dworple@barefootproximity.com

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Executive Creative Director: Troy Hitch