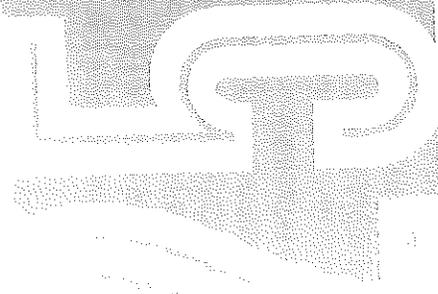


d to keep in
peak directly
deck, when
icular grant
section and
reviewed at

use a little ex-
platforms in
ide sheet" —
ensions and
erally write a
e, still image,
ample, "This
o of the main
acter X, who
t of the grant
k for you.

"sculpture,"
st advantage.
at the organi-
one another
nmakers." As
ear this as an
ource) and ap-
great grant ap-
with care. That
work that the
ught embrace



... And Maybe Make Some Profit, Too

In general, you don't strictly need to turn a dime in profit directly from commissioned work, but if you have investors—and that might include yourself and the sweat of your brow—then you really need your project to have a revenue stream.

To date, there have been only a few businesses focused on creating stand-alone transmedia entertainment as their core business, and none of them has been a runaway success. Indeed, a successful and ongoing transmedia business model is the industry's holy grail. But just as we borrow production techniques from other disciplines, so should we look to them for other ways to monetize our creations.

The first and most obvious method for monetizing your project is to have your audience pay you directly for content. It works for books and movies, why not for multiplatform narratives? But the subscription model has a checkered history.

artifact that the Perplexians had lost. The clever winner who found it buried in the woods in Southeast England won a reward of \$200,000.

The sale of physical items that shed light on the story has also gained traction in the publishing industry. *Cathy's Book*, by Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman, is one of the most successful transmedia novel experiments to date. The physical book sold in stores included an "evidence folder" of photographs, postcards, and the like. The content included multiple references to expanded content that readers could engage with, including phone numbers players could call to listen to voice mail messages and websites to visit. Jordan Weisman used a similar model in working with J. C. Hutchins on *Personal Effects: Dark Art*.

Light transmedia experiences confined to a single mobile application have made their appearance on the market, too; *Hidden Park* and *Urban Sleuth*, for example. And while a revenue stream for it is not yet clear, Fourth Wall Studios' *RIDES* platform looks poised to offer short paid experiences to audiences that start in a browser window but extend to using the phone, email, and other media.

Live performances that extend into digital spaces can always charge for tickets, of course. *Accomplice*, for example, is an interactive show performed in New York and Los Angeles that takes the audience through a sequence of locations and situations over the course of the show, essentially allowing them to live out a story in small groups. And World Wrestling Entertainment, probably one of the most successful and least-talked-about transmedia enterprises in existence, charges for admission to its matches—with additional revenue streams from TV rights, special pay-per-view bouts, and plenty of merchandising.

The biggest problems with executing pay-to-play are traditional business problems as much as creative ones. Making a compelling story is just the beginning. After that, how do you get a product on shelves or sell tickets? How do you promote? How do you distribute? If you plan to go this way, you'd better have a rock-solid business plan for dealing with these issues—or a partnership agreement with somebody who can do it for you.

n fee was *Majes-*
 innovative game
 tant messaging,
 new players that
 nsspiracy behind
 year because of
 e idea that audi-
 till lingers in the
 audiences pay for

nsmedia projects
 . EDOC Laundry
 y with the sale of
 s. There was also

ercial alternate re-
 g, too). Packs of
 e contained refer-
 it a persistent but
 ad its own weekly
 other institutions
 e real—along with
 emails, all in the
 e of the game was a
 to locate a priceless

they can look distracting and unprofessional, and they aren't going to make you very much money unless you're getting an awful lot of traffic. In the cost/benefit analysis, I come down against banner ads and the like; your mileage may vary.

Hussie can get away with it because the overall site isn't fictional in nature; but running ads on your protagonist's personal weblog can be jarring and can cheapen the overall look and feel. It's better to keep ads away from entirely fictional spaces, unless you can present a reasonable in-story reason for them to be there. (And even then, you should give serious thought to running fictional ads instead, or in addition, the better to build out your world.)

Product placement can, in theory, be a little more elegant. You won't be able to get a product placement deal unless you can prove you have a pretty good audience going already, though. The only transmedia project or ARG I'm aware of that has done product placement was *lonelygirl15*, and the execution was awfully heavy-handed, presumably because *lonelygirl* didn't have a lot of bargaining power. I don't think this revenue stream has yet been explored the way it could be.

Finally, there is the sponsorship angle. There haven't been many sponsorship deals thus far in transmedia, but the main caveat is the same as for product placement: your chances of getting a deal hinge entirely on proving that your content is worth the sponsor's time and money. Both sides have to receive value from the transaction.

DONATIONS

One of my favorite transmedia-lite projects, *Shadow Unit*, puts out its content for free, with only a tip jar. *Shadow Unit* is the work of a handful of award-winning science fiction authors who have fans of their work built in, teaming up to write, as they call it, "fan fiction for a show that never existed."

I don't know how much money they've made from the project, but it's certainly not millions. It's not even enough for them to live off of; the creators are all still primarily working hard on other projects. And even so, it's certainly more than you're

re stream that
e of merchan-

ventures. This
it's a lot more
and includes
e project also
ments where
of one of the
ve—much of
aking sugges-

1 T-shirts and
ntributed by a
entire albums

ith the advent
ake a few de-
1 storefront to

ed indie work,
uct placement.
, for example,
don't have to
websites. But

likely to make if you go down this road, since you're unlikely to have the fan base of an award-winning science fiction author in your pocket.

Still, there are advantages to this approach. By creating zero barriers to entry for their content, the writers for *Shadow Unit* (and like-minded single-platform artists like Amanda Palmer, Jonathan Coulton, and Cory Doctorow) are making it easier to get new, enthusiastic audience members. As the audience size grows, the odds of being able to monetize the project in other ways down the pike grow more significant—by getting a book or movie deal based on their content, for example. If you give it a try, you won't be rolling in bucks, but you might be able to bankroll the resources you use to create more work, and in turn climb the ladder to making money through sponsorships, subscriptions, and merchandise.

Ultimately, all of this hinges on your ability to attract and hold an audience that values your content enough to plunk down some money. All the revenue streams in the world won't help you if you aren't making something that somebody wants to be a part of.

Q&A: EVAN JONES

Evan Jones worked on the International Emmy-winning project *ReGenesis*, a TV series with groundbreaking interactive components. He went on to cofound Stitch Media, the studio behind award-winning projects like *Remix Redress*, *Moderation Town*, and *The Drunk and On Drugs Happy Funtime Hour*.

Q: Where do you see the art and business of storytelling headed over the next few years?

A: More than anything, I see it gaining legitimacy. I've joked for years about the "hierarchy of media" where theater directors are high art and game designers are low art. It's amazing to watch the video-games industry eclipse Hollywood in revenue, yet very few people can name any of the creative minds the way

Entertainment
furthest ahead
how far they
models emerg
ment and bra
some days th
"storytellers
they'll accom

What I n
that someone
around for it
pect of medi
able busines
that. If you v
someone els
set up a min
all things th
the scarcity

Q: What would yo
improve their c
A: What are yo
again? Ove
started my
that there c
and see fro

The otl
I've never i
film. Becal
seek out th

Entertainment Tonight profiles film festivals. I very much believe that the people furthest ahead of the curve are the audiences, who continually surprise me with how far they're willing to engage the right story at the right time. As business models emerge, I also see a collision on the horizon, where art and entertainment and branding and marketing are all getting muddled together—it seems some days that it's a new frontier and every sector wants to reinvent itself as “storytellers.” Stories are very elastic and universal things, though, and I think they'll accommodate all of these in some form.

What I notice about a lot of “future projections” is that they are anticipating that someone will crack the elusive nut of a business model. I'm not waiting around for that day, and I think it's odd to see transmedia incorporate every aspect of media history without thinking that it might also include every conceivable business model, too. Over the next few years, we might come to terms with that. If you want to make something and you can charge money for it, go for it. If someone else is going to become a patron of your work, perfect. The earliest web set up a mindset that it was a phone book or a library card or a direct mailing—all things that we assumed were “free.” The value of stories isn't decreasing, but the scarcity of them is, and it's thrown us for a temporary loop.

Q: *What would you recommend that transmedia creators learn about to improve their craft?*

A: What are you better at than anyone else, and what should you never attempt again? Overwhelmingly, transmedia has shown me that it's a team effort. I started my career as an “all-in-one” web monkey, and it is tantalizing to think that there could be an “auteur culture” in transmedia. The best stuff I work on and see from others has strong teams that know where they want to collaborate.

The other homework I'd assign is to make sure that you love transmedia. I've never met an author who doesn't love books or a director who doesn't love film. Because this is a relatively undefined and evanescent space, it's hard to seek out the “classics,” but I would raise alarms for creators who don't find

the fan base of
ers to entry for
atform artists
ing it easier to
he odds of be-
significant—
e. If you give
nkroll the re-
aking money

audience that
venue streams
body wants to

genesis, a TV se-
ofound Stitch
ss, *Moderation*

years about the
game designers
ipse Hollywood
minds the way

themselves immersed in other people's transmedia projects. I'm constantly fascinated by other people's work in this field and flipping back and forth between producer and consumer all the time.

Q: *What made you decide to start your own business?*

A: A thousand different reasons, but the only one that's relevant to this conversation is that I found I was bursting with new ideas and needed to start focusing my attention on those. I had learned through amazing mentors how to do nearly every aspect of a project, and I saw a clear path ahead with Stitch Media.

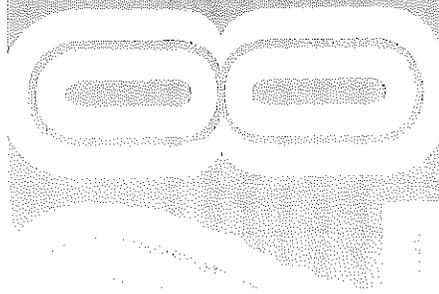
Q: *What should you consider before you open shop?*

A: So many answers to this question . . . Over the past five years, I have certainly earned an MBA with the intense learning on the fly. Anyone with any business theory or experience at all would laugh at my mistakes—so much so that I find a good portion of my time is now spent on the business matters of my company rather than the creative freedom that generated the company. It's a very important point for all creators who want a company to form around their ideas—being an entrepreneur is not a part-time job. It would also have been nice to have had some sort of capital before I started (but I realize now that I wouldn't have spent it wisely). Building up a dedicated team with equipment to do the job was a significant investment, and those are hard costs that somebody has to pay while you wait for the final payment on your first project.

Q: *How competitive is it out there for a start-up?*

A: It's competitive, and that's a good thing. Nobody should ever start a business that no one else wants. At the same time, though, it's confusing—the media landscape is converging, and it's revealing a lot of overlap. When I want a great transmedia story, do I engage an agency or a broadcaster or a studio or a production company or an artist? Even I don't know the answer to this, and you'll see that the hardest job many start-ups have in this field is educating the market about what they really do.

On the personal level, I'm constantly fascinated by other people's work in this field and flipping back and forth between producer and consumer all the time.



Get Excited and Make Things

During the writing of this book, I had a conversation with a colleague who was asking why there aren't any million-dollar design competitions for alternate reality games. Surely, he thought, the big companies have a vested interest in fostering new talent and funneling it into our field. Why isn't there more money floating around out there, just waiting for someone who has a great idea?

This is very much the wrong question to ask and the wrong attitude to have if you're serious about becoming a creator. To explain why, I'm going to need to be very frank about the darkest point in my career.

HARD TIMES

December 2007 was a really, really bad time for me. My run with *Perplex City* had ended unexpectedly in June when the second season, already in production, was scrapped. Afterward, I quickly found a job with a new game start-up that was contingent only on the funding coming through—and the contract with the investor had already been signed. As the weather grew colder, it became clearer and clearer that the ink on that funding deal was worthless. No money was in the offing (nor would it ever be).

So I was broke. Broke enough to do SEO writing and to scour Craigslist for any shady copywriting gig I could find. Worried about making mortgage payments. Trying to find a job, and failing. I kept going into New York City to have meetings and job interviews with interactive or digital ad agencies. I'd talk about games, narrative, and deep engagement; they'd talk about banner ads and SEO. It was as if I were from a different planet (or, as it turns out, as if I were from the future).

And as much as I was desperate to do paying work, I was equally hungry to do fulfilling work. *Perplex City* had been three years of incredible creative collaboration with an exceptional team, and it was gone, gone, gone. I was lonely and unproductive. I was terrified that my career as a creator had ground to a halt and would never move forward again. I was waiting for a break. Waiting for an offer. Waiting for someone to notice me and tell me what to do next. And waiting, and waiting, and waiting.

And then I started talking to my old friend and fellow Cloudmaker Jay Bushman. He had recently launched a Twitter adaptation of a Herman Melville story called *The Good Captain*. Every day for three months, *The Good Captain* spun out a few short sentences of the tale of a drifting spaceship and the robot mutiny that had led to the ship's dire situation.

I found myself profoundly jealous of Bushman's ability to create and promote something so interesting when it wasn't his job and he had no funding. What did he have that I didn't?

The answer, something with resources and owned, and the connection and the many countries.

But Twitter. It was just a technique. All the setting it out into

Some time narrative, test I made a short small-scale project; a group

I'll be the tion or in con way; the point artists, and w enough and y find a way to l

A curious I got, too, and talk about tra ing to make s privilege of w and most tale

DIY

The answer, of course, was nothing at all. Nothing but the sheer drive to create, that is. This ignited the spark in me that had been missing: the passion to just make something with whatever resources I had on hand. Since I was so dead broke, those resources amounted to my brain, my fingers to type with, the computer I already owned, and the Internet connection I was already paying for. (Even the Internet connection and the computer are negotiable; libraries across the United States and in many countries offer computers with Internet access free to the public.)

But Twitter is free. So I made Madame Zee, a Twitter account to tell horoscopes. It was just a tiny little project, a single tweet a day, and it never found a mass audience. All the same, it felt absolutely amazing to be making something new and putting it out into the world.

Some time later, I decided to experiment with Google Calendars as a vehicle for narrative, testing my theory that anything at all can tell a story if you try hard enough. I made a short time travel story called *Circular Logic* and posted it to my blog. Other small-scale personal projects followed: a collaborative wiki fiction experiment called *Voices*; a group writing challenge called *My Super First Day*.

I'll be the first to admit that none of these things were exceptional in execution or in concept. They are by far not my finest work. But that's not the point anyway; the point is that in pursuing my vision, I joined the ranks of indie filmmakers, artists, and writers who know (and have always known) that if you're passionate enough and you're willing to put in the time to develop the necessary skills, you'll find a way to be creative—even without venture capital, grants, or contracts.

A curious correlation arose. The more indie stuff I made, the more paying work I got, too, and on an amazing array of projects. Why? There are a lot of people who talk about transmedia. It turns out that there are precious few who are actually trying to make something with what they have right now. Since then, I've had the great privilege of working on a number of high-profile projects with some of the finest and most talented creators in the field.



Don't keep calm and carry on

*Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial
Sharealike art by Matt Jones. Used with
permission.*

And it's nothing special about me; you can do it, too. Just prove that you have the ambition to create, no matter what your situation. That puts you at a decided advantage.

So my biggest, most important lesson is this: you can't wait for permission or funding or a contract or a job. Once you get this—and I mean really, really get this—you and your career will be transformed. You will be liberated. Don't hang around hoping that somebody specifically asks you to make something. Find something to get excited about, and then, as the Nike ads go, Just Do It.

There has never been a more exciting time to be a storyteller, and we're sitting on the brink of a whole new art form. We don't know what it's going to look like when it grows up, but that means that we can try just about anything we want.

Take a deep breath, and then jump into it. You won't regret it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Film and game industry publications like *Variety*, *IndieWire*, *AdAge*, and *The Escapist* sometimes cover transmedia, as do consumer publications like *Wired*, *Salon*, and *Newsweek*. But here are a select few more targeted news sources and blogs to learn from:

Transmedia Talk. This weekly podcast, hosted by Nick Braccia, Haley Moore, and Dee Cook, offers analysis of the space and interviews with some of the most fascinating creators in transmedia today. Transmedia Talk is hosted by the Workbook Project. <http://workbookproject.com>

StoryForward. This fascinating podcast hosted by Steve Peters and J. C. Hutchins features deep interviews about process and practice with luminaries of the transmedia scene. <http://www.storyforwardpodcast.com>

ARGNet.
branched
articles at
<http://www>

MovieVix
ing camp
media pr
Universe

on trans
wisdom

Unfiction
core AR
length a
stand if

Transm
ness an
<http://n>

There are a
the year it
rators, and to

Power1
comm
[www:p](http://www.p)

ARGNet. Originally a blog covering alternate reality games, this site has since branched out to cover all manner of transmedia projects. Sometimes these articles are syndicated to the Wired Decode blog, which is also worth a look. <http://www.argn.com>

MovieViral. Like ARGNet, this blog once focused exclusively on viral marketing campaigns for films, but has since expanded to report on a variety of transmedia projects. <http://www.movieviral.com>

Universe Creation 101/You Suck at Transmedia. Dr. Christy Dena's thoughts on transmedia production and the creative process. She brings the hard-won wisdom of experience to her work. <http://www.yousuckattransmedia.com>

Unfiction. This site features an online forum that is the heart of the hardcore ARG community, but it also discusses wider transmedia projects at great length and with great frequency. This is an excellent community to understand if you're planning any interactive elements. <http://www.unfiction.com>

Transmythology. Simon Pulman of Starlight Runner blogs about the business and production side of transmedia. His analysis is often very insightful. <http://transmythology.com>

CONFERENCES

There are a number of conferences focusing on transmedia storytelling throughout the year that you might consider attending to meet potential clients and collaborators, and to build stronger ties with the overall community of transmedia creators.

Power to the Pixel. This London-based conference springs from the indie film community. Many excellent talks from prior years are available online. <http://www.powertothepixel.com>

rove that you
1. That puts
wait for per-
-and I mean
1. You will be
ally asks you
t then, as the
er, and we're
what it's go-
ry just about
t it.

, AdAge, and
publications
ore targeted

Haley Moore,
a some of the
alk is hosted

ers and J. C.
th luminaries

TEDx Transmedia. TEDx Transmedia may not be an annual event, but the talks from 2010 are available online. <http://www.tedxtransmedia.com>

StoryWorld. The first-ever StoryWorld was held in 2011, and as of this writing another is planned in 2012. It promises to become an unmissable and exclusively transmedia-focused affair. <http://www.storyworldconference.com>

SXSW. This annual music, film, and interactive festival in Austin isn't solely focused on transmedia, but creators of transmedia works have an increasingly large presence there. This is a great conference to attend for meeting others working in the same space. Audio and even video for many of the talks are available online. <http://sxsw.com>

GDC. Like SXSW, the Game Developer's Conference is not exclusively focused on transmedia, but it is a great place to find more than a few creators and potential clients. <http://www.gdconf.com>

To begin,
my stelli
thanks to y
of confider
Vogel, Patt
book polist
Thank
and grace v
everything
for their lo
alike. I love
Very, v
above and
man, Micl