

Thoughts on promoting, supporting and addressing Canadian Content in a Digital World.

ADDRESS

Finding a Canadian voice to help create a brand:

In the DigiCanCon session I was a part of and the one in Toronto that was streamed the diversity that makes up our country was not represented. People from diverse cultures and also youth (the ones who live in the digital market) are a vital piece of this puzzle. Perhaps the difficulty we are having in finding on true Canadian voice is because we are actually a choir.

Taking the elite vibe off Canadian content. We have this weird dichotomy. We are pretty laid back as a people but our culture is broken up into classes - commercial equals bad / innovative excellence equals good = as far as funding goes.

Innovative excellence is created often using a language that only a few know and that's why it's difficult to get buy in from the general public. This kind of work is important. Of course there must be art/film that is challenging and makes you think but that shouldn't diminish the value of simple storytelling.

We have this system of art stars here that stay within their circle of subjects. They are lauded with a reverence that is very intimidating for a general population. They win the prizes and the grants. But those that create in a more basic way are not given the same kind of respect. And so you set up the general public to feel uncomfortable around art and artists because they don't measure up.

If you go to the MOMA in NYC you'll see the work of incredible masters. People flock to it with their kids who are running around and enjoying the place as an experience. You stumble upon a Van Gogh and there is no shield keeping you from just enjoying it as a beautiful painting. At the AGO or National Gallery it feels like a mausoleum that you must respect and revere the space and the works. It's not laid back. Not approachable. And that goes against everything we are as a people. We are friendly and inviting. We aren't stuck up. We aren't better than you.

That's my feeling of how to address our content. Take that elitism off of it and just let us see the cool things we make and ideas that we present. Once that happens - getting it out to the digital world shouldn't be that hard.

PROMOTE

Finding champions on the International stage:

With Trudeau's international popularity and making Canada cool again I'm sure it wouldn't be hard to gather up the 'stars' that come from here to do a promo add for Canada arts. Then the question goes back to what is the message, what is our voice and where do we want people to engage it.

Get youth involved:

Youth are the mouthpiece for Canada on the internet. They choose their content. They need to see themselves in that content. They need to be included. Maybe a web series where kids breakdown Canada's culture. Maybe even the youngest kids can have their favourite Canadian kids icons walk them through some art/culture exposing them to what's out there. Maybe there is a specific brand that a series could revolve around - we have a beta project at www.friendshipfair.com that was proposed to be turned into a creative hub for kids for Canada 150. Not only showing them creativity in Canada but getting them to be creative.

The big note though is that you need BUY IN from kids. You need to get them invested and they will be not only your content consumers but they will share share share and become ambassadors of your brand.

SUPPORT

I am an arts administrator on PEI. We believe as citizens of Canada that our voices should be part of the Canadian brand - and not just Anne of Green Gables. Our Province is having difficulty opting in to the arts and thereby triggering Federal funds so we are seeing all of the funding that should be shared equally going to urban art centres where budgets are higher. This is excluding smaller regions all over Canada I'm sure.

CMF

Programs like the CMF regional incentive fund cannot be triggered in PEI because of lack of provincial opt-in.

Our Canada Council applications for individual artists are often turned down because the province cannot support the infrastructure it takes to develop creative careers.

Canada Council

And we are also not being represented properly on Canada Council juries. They would do better to have a jury for urban centres and a jury for regional centres. Even though they may not be from the same region at least the peer groups will be speaking a similar language as far as cultural development within the communities.

To realize those that do well are the ones that have figured out how to navigate the incredibly complex and biased system in the various funding agencies is going to be very important to identifying what the Canadian voice really is.

On a specific note the level of development in various regions is important to note as the kind of content to come out of regions will vary in 'difficulty' level. Canada Council strives for excellence and to many people who sit on juries excellence comes from being challenged by the innovativeness of the project. To be fair - this kind of innovation may be well beyond the skill level of a regional artist because of lack of access to schooling and urban centres. That doesn't mean their expression is valueless. Short narrative filmmaking is the expression of choice on PEI yet Canada Council juries refuse to recognize this as a valid art form and organizations like Telefilm require opt in from other funding sources to work with this part of development within a filmmaker's career.

The thing is that we in regions are not looking for handouts. We are looking for restrictions to be eased or policies to work for the regions to allow for us to have a fair shot at the incredible amount of money that the Federal government has put into the cultural sector. I'm sure this is the same with in many other minority groups. It's not easy to navigate CCA and Heritage applications.

WHAT IS WORKING

I want to add that I am a filmmaker who recently won a Telefilm Microbudget grant and it's gone a long way to help me in my career. Regardless of the success of the actual project, the process alone is showing me the intricacies of producing on a larger scale. This was one of those programs that didn't need provincial opt-in. I'm not sure if Telefilm was asked to fund in all provinces and territories this year but it definitely has been a boost to our creative energy in PEI. Many people learned a lot on this shoot. To have the freedom to experiment regardless of the outcome of the piece has been an investment in a whole community. I am now able to teach my coop members everything I've learned. And the amount

of production and film buzz happening in PEI right now is amazing. Programs like this are incredible when distributed fairly. Giving an opportunity to each region may end in differing results because we are all at different levels of growth. It may be important to adjust expectations for these programs keeping this in mind.

SUGGESTIONS

I also would like to add that I was educated in conceptual art at U of T 25 years ago. Though I create fun commercial work I do believe that we need to invest in less commercial ventures and champion them. Minister Joly may want to consider including Tagaq in her list of awesome Canadians. She has created a hunger for her truly unique voice. She is a great example of the cross pollination of genres and how even such non-commercial content can find international following which includes Bjork.

On this topic of intersecting sectors Subtle Technologies is a Canadian festival that intersects art, science and technology bringing people in their field to meet up in Canada from across the world. It's the epitome of innovation and cutting edge Canadian efforts. I imagine Heritage funds this conference - it may be a place to stage a market for people and government programs in differing disciplines to intersect as was suggested at the Halifax DigiCanCon.

And there are many artists from a variety of genres that have a name on the international arts scene that could be included in her presentations. Just because we are speaking about a digital world doesn't mean that digital cultural content is the only thing the government cares about. I think that may be misleading in this conversation. This is just a suggestion but so much money goes into Canada Council projects funded by them may do well to be presented to the groups you are speaking to.

Conclusion

In the end we in PEI just want to make content and build creative practices and careers. We also very much want to participate in our national and global dialogue while remaining in our home province which is now possible because of the internet. This is what is so great and why the internet creates a level playing field for people living anywhere in the world. We hope government will follow suit. Create a level playing field and we will get you results.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to bring you our challenges and thoughts.

