

1/ "What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?"

We all know the entry point for creating media is significantly lower than it once was. And, thank goodness. When an idea struck me for my serial narrative story - I had no entry point into the established media industries. In fact, I saw them as very unwelcoming. So, I didn't bother. With relatively low hard costs and a group of volunteer cast and crew, I was able to write, produce, direct, shoot, edit, distribute and market: Out With Dad. This series about a Torontonion girl coming out to her single father. Out With Dad has gone on to become one of the most successful, most watched, most awarded web series ever produced in Canada. It has twice been nominated for the Canadian Screen Awards. All this has happened without a single penny spent on traditional marketing.

We filmed in and around Toronto at friends houses and at local businesses. The story was not set in a 'nonspecific every-town North America'. Nope! I am telling a Canadian story set in Toronto, Ontario. I endeavoured to include the CN Tower in shots at every opportunity, my characters ride the TTC and pronounced Toronto with a soft 't' at the end. I challenged our international viewers with references to Poke-a-roo, amused them with milk poured from plastic bags, acknowledged our two publicly funded school systems, and yes, they do say "eh?". All that said, Out With Dad isn't a collection of Canadian cliches; the characters have uniquely Canadian hearts, perspectives and experiences. Growing up gay in Toronto is a different than it is for others around the country and the world. While still hardly an easy ride, we get some things right. My mission statement for this story was to present a positive role model for the tweens, teens and parents watching - and I think Toronto, and indeed Canada, is seen as a positive role model on the world stage. Our global audience are thankful for our show. It has helped give courage to young people to come out, and in some cases, the courage to keep on living.

However the success of Out With Dad is not typical.

All this could only happen because I had a couple of good financial years prior to embarking on this project; which meant I could afford to work nearly full-time hours for several years while generating a large audience. Only then could we reach out to them ask our fans to financially support our third season, which they did by way of a successful crowdfunding campaign. Now in our fifth season, the series is funded entirely by our audience on an ongoing basis thanks to Patreon.com, an American crowdfunding service. We couldn't have gotten to this (barely) sustainable funding model had it not been for those early years of making and marketing the show for free. If I were to start work on a new project tomorrow - I can't afford to do that ground work again.

There hasn't been another Out With Dad in Canada since, and there should have been. I've made every effort to promote and champion other local creators so they too can be the next Out With Dad, and it hasn't happened. The experience of having made this series has opened many doors for me, my cast, and my crew - but our careers have yet to really "take off". Creating Out With Dad is a full time

commitment, and working to broaden our horizons is not feasible, and because I didn't raise through the 'traditional' ranks of the industry so my efforts don't seem to be regarded as 'legitimate'. To this day, I have not seen a penny of funding from public or private funds. Our spending threshold is too low to be eligible for tax credits; and despite having established a massive audience and over 27 million views, Out With Dad is still regarded as the little league.

If Canada is to have a culture that is instantly recognizable to our friends around the globe (and even to ourselves), then we must enable new storytellers to push the boundaries of digital mediums that are growing and changing everyday.

2/ "How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in the digital world. And how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?"

Canada's creative output in the digital world is already stand out material. I've had the good fortune of having attended several international web series festivals over the past few years. The one thing they all have in common is Canadian content is always well represented. In fact, we are often over-represented given our small population. Take for instance, the Marseille Webfest which I had the honour to attend in 2012. That festival had only twenty-three official selections from around the world - and six of those were from Canada. No other country was as well represented. In fact, the US and France were the only countries with more than one official selection, of only two series each. We make great stuff, and our work speaks for itself. I'm constantly asked by my international colleagues what is the magic in Canada? They recognize that something special is happening here. A lot of it has to do with the nurturing support within the creative community of struggling artists. We don't compete against each other, we want each of us to succeed. It gave us a lead. Our creativity shines in a world market, and we have great voices and great talent that catches the eye.

I've observed that the series representing Canada on the world stage at these festivals have something in common: they were made by creatives who had the financial security to make them, or the willingness to go into serious debt to fund their passion projects.

What my experiences abroad have taught me is that we could very well dominate the digital world if more Canadians could afford to incubate themselves and create. It is as simple as that.

3/ "How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive, and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?"

It's so simple: we need simple access to funds to get our work off the ground so that we may focus our talent and ability: on developing our ideas, producing them, and then (and this is often forgotten or unknown to rookies) marketing our work.

Currently, accessing these funds are exceedingly difficult. Most of the infrastructure for funding bodies are out of date. A lot of the new kinds of storytelling occurring in the digital space don't fit into legacy check boxes, and are therefore not eligible - or not recognized as legitimate. While artists are encouraged to be original, we are obligated to demonstrate that it can be done. "New and innovative, with a proven track record" should not be the entry point into the funding system.

Canada needs to take chances on enabling Canadians to tell our stories in unique ways, and then push them into the world so that they can be seen.