

Canadian Content in a Digital World

Canadian Content Roundtable Discussion
Held in Vancouver on September 16th, 2016

Report submitted by Creative BC
November 25, 2016

On September 16, 2016, Creative BC was pleased to host a British Columbian film, television and digital media industry roundtable discussion. We engaged a facilitator who utilized the consultation framework identified by the Department of Canadian Heritage in its document "Canadian Content in a Digital World." During this roundtable, we focused on ways to strengthen the creation, discovery and export of Canadian content in a digital world.

1. Key takeaways from the Creative BC roundtable discussion

For our participants, there was one overriding sentiment:

- What we love best about Canadian culture and creativity is that our stories reflect the soul of this nation, ***our sense of terroir***.
- **And, therefore**, the best way to move forward should be in support of our creative voices, regardless of platform or delivery system.

This belief in our unique voices was the underpinning for participants in the following key discussion points:

- We should look for more fluid and dynamic ways to provide flexibility with financing and creative development in Canada.
- It is important to develop a more modern and flexible system, where the focus was financial investment, not "subsidy", and where business models were supported.
- We need to ensure new entry points for emerging and diverse content creators and new funding models to adapt to evolving digital platforms.
- In the digital environment where content is easily available from around the world, discoverability of our Canadian content becomes critical.
- Targeted funds to attend global markets, meet international partners and grow our production and distribution capabilities will be key to our success.

2. Consultation Questions and Feedback

The roundtable discussion facilitated by Creative BC brought forth a variety of comments and responses from the participants. We are pleased to present a summary of the various comments below.

Consultation Question 1:

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

- Many comments revolved around enhancing existing policies to support creators and limit constraints in the current system. However, there was concern of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, in that not all of the system was problematic.
- A number of participants felt there was a need to develop a more flexible system where the focus was financial investment, not “subsidy” and where business models were supported. It was mentioned that it would be helpful if the current tax credit system was simplified and payments were fast-tracked, and that the requirement to have a broadcast licence or distributor on board would be reviewed.
- It was agreed by many that new entry points for emerging and diverse content creators and new funding models to adapt to the digital platform need to be formulated.
- There was mention that producers are content creators and need to be recognized as such, as the amalgamators of talent and risk takers in the financial structures of Canadian content.
- The monopoly of broadcaster distribution for Canadian content was considered problematic by many participants. It was expressed that we should look at ways to re-design the supply chain for Canadian content production.
- Similarly, vertical integration in the broadcasting system was mentioned as potentially harmful to citizen choice and the independence of producers. Many noted there is a dependency on broadcasters and distributors that is not always in the best interests of consumers domestically or audiences internationally.

Consultation Question 2:

How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada’s creativity in the digital world, and how can we use digital content to promote a strong democracy?

- It was felt that Canada’s brand was not well defined and it was noted that previous attempts in promoting “Canada” as a brand haven’t necessarily translated into increased awareness by Canadians, or sales of Canadian content internationally. Perhaps we need a new playbook.
- Many participants felt we need to better reflect all the faces of Canada in our content, and identify and remove barriers to new, diverse storytellers. Broadcasters should be encouraged to be flexible and inclusive in their Canadian content.

- As part of the discussion, many felt that we need a definition of “digital” and “discoverability”. What we should look at are simple and actionable discoverability mechanisms, as we re-think digital channels for promotion and distribution. It would be valuable to have more producer-led audience engagement tools.
- How do we define Canadian content? Many participants supported a more modern and adaptive system to foster new collaborations. We should identify clear roles for Telefilm, the Canada Media Fund and Canada’s brand.

Consultation Question 3:

How do we support Canada’s creators and cultural entrepreneurs and help them reach beyond our borders?

- The focus of many comments was to look for more fluid and dynamic ways to provide flexibility with financing and creative development in Canada.
- It was agreed by many that it would be helpful to have simple rules on “How to work with Canada” to make co-production treaties more flexible and less paperwork intensive.
- We are challenged by geography by being close to the US, and a number of participants voiced a need for stronger IP rules and regulations to protect Canadian ideas, including retaining IP rights from Canadian broadcasters and OTT operators. (For example, the Producer of Record approach undermines independent producers.)
- Targeted funds to attend global markets, meet international partners and grow our production and distribution capabilities was found by many to be a critical component to success.
- Many expressed that we need education/training and tools to leverage data and be strategic on building audiences and expanding reach (discoverability).
- Our investors are Canadians (tax payers) and so many believed it is important to look at both Canadian audiences versus non-Canadian audiences.

3. Creative BC’s Perspective

Creative BC is an independent, not-for profit agency created by the Province of British Columbia in April 2013 to build the capacity of BC’s creative sector. The agency, which combines the services of the former BC Film Commission and BC Film + Media, has a mandate to support and strengthen BC’s film and television, interactive and digital media, music and sound recording and magazine and book publishing industries.

From books and magazines to film, TV, music and even games, there is no question that we are currently experiencing dramatic disruption on many fronts – in the way we create content, the way we distribute it to consumers, how these consumers are consuming our content, where they are accessing it, and how we are aiming to monetize it.

We all agree that there have been seismic shifts in consumer behavior, and the technologies they are using to consume what we produce. And we're not seeing that rate of change slowing down.

Yet in a country with our relatively small population and next door to a cultural behemoth, we have historically had to struggle with managing the competing demands of economic versus cultural objectives in our Canadian content system.

This continues to be the challenge in the current consultation environment as we move into the digital space, domestically and internationally. In the digital environment where content is easily available from around the world, discoverability of our Canadian content becomes critical.

Ultimately, this consultation framework is asking a fundamental question – is it Canadian content's role to hold us together as a nation? Or is it now our job to focus on taking Canada to the world?

4. Summary

Thank you for this opportunity to provide the Department of Canadian Heritage with the results and feedback from the Creative BC roundtable in September. The discussions were not intended to get into the details of changing the Canadian system, but more simply to grapple with defining the areas to focus and improve upon in a digital world.

It was acknowledged there remains much work to be done on inclusiveness and support of diverse creative talent here in Canada. At the same time, it was invigorating that everyone involved in the discussion felt pride in our Canadian distinctiveness, our openness and our ability to collaborate at the international level.

We look forward to participating in future discussions with the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Submitted by:



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