

The disrupted screen production sector reveals patterns of consistency

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Abstract

This article interrogates the impact of digital technologies, including the internet, as disrupters of traditional screen production industries. The privileging of direct links between creators and audiences, as seen in myriad new content delivery platforms, including YouTube, Netflix, Vimeo and Amazon, underpins the foundation of an emerging communication world where access, voice, diversity and engagement are radically altered from what was once thought of as screen production. Yet in the ensuing chaos, screen content creators from diverse cultures and experience are finding patterns of consistency in their navigation of this emerging production environment. This article focuses on how screen producers are navigating this disrupted environment, and blends two very different perspectives from a screen producer in Australia, practised in non-mainstream, crowdfunded content, on the one hand; and a UK-based screen producer whose experience includes content production for some of the largest legacy broadcasters in the world on the other.

Keywords: crowd funding; disruption; legacy media; niche audiences; screen production

Background and methodology

In his keynote address at the 2017 Australian International Documentary Conference, Graeme Mason, CEO of Screen Australia, spoke very clearly of the socio-technical disruptions in the screen production sector, and warned producers to adapt or perish:

Audiences and distribution models have not stood still – so you can't either. Our sector is fragmenting and becoming more and more global in many ways. If you are rooted forever in the traditional and established models, you will be left behind. If you are fully operating in the subsidy model, you are in real danger. (Mason, 2017)

This article addresses the experiences of two producers who have heeded this call. It involves 'guided reflection' (Johns, 2002, 2010) upon the development of production careers at a time of disruption, individual input from each of the authors and a comparison of both similar and different experiences of media-making in different

contexts and on different continents that nonetheless serves to show that successful adaptation to a digital screen industry environment requires similar strategies and an embracing of opportunity.

The methodology adopted for this article was a joint guided reflection interview conducted by Lelia Green with Cathy Henkel (ECU) and Andrea Michell (Bravura Films Ltd, UK). The two interviewees engaged in deep discussion and collaborative exchange, following Christopher Johns' model, as 'a process of self-enquiry to enable the practitioner to realise desirable and effective practice within a reflexive spiral of being and becoming ... reflecting upon our own wisdom as practitioners, giving voice to our personal knowing, ideas and opinions' (Johns, 2002, p. 3).

Cathy Henkel and Andrea Michell had each briefed Lelia Green separately regarding the areas they felt were relevant to their reflection, and thus had already engaged with the issues to hand. Green took the information provided and used it to construct the questions that guided participants' reflections to a deeper level.

All three participants were co-located at Edith Cowan University and the collaboration occurred at the end of a Visiting Scholar engagement by Andrea Michell at the WA Screen Academy, where Henkel is Director. The first draft of the paper was based on Green's edit of the resulting transcript, which was then revised and augmented by Cathy Henkel and Andrea Michell in the context of a collaborative exchange. This honoured Johns' view that guided reflection is part of the narrative tradition and its outcomes can be constructed as 'a *journey* of being and becoming, not as a *process*, as if it were being manufactured' (Johns, 2010, n.p.). Accordingly, this article, revised in response to reviewers' reports, is seen as part of that continuing exchange, and a starting point for more discussion.

Over the course of 25 years working as an independent documentary producer, writer and director in Australia, Cathy Henkel has seen many changes and disruptions in her sector. These changes have directly affected diversity in funding, production and distribution options, provided access to new technologies and audiences, afforded more creative freedom to directors and expanded direct engagement with viewers and audiences. As Henkel (2016) says:

Throughout my career, I've never known where my next income was coming from. All the films I've made have been my own stories, told from my own perspective, and each film has taken between two and five years to make, so the 'self-employed' model has been my experience. I've never worked for an ABC or a BBC or any of the big companies. In fact coming to ECU [as Director of the Screen Academy] is the first 'paid job' that I've had in my life.

Andrea Michell has experienced a very different trajectory, with an apparently conventional career in the United Kingdom as a program-maker with BBC TV, followed by a move into independent production. Like Cathy Henkel, Andrea Michell's production expertise also involves collaborative writing and directing roles, and is discussed in more detail below. This article explores the different trajectories that brought these two producers together. It focuses on the producer role, even though

both Cathy Henkel and Andrea Michell also have expertise in writing and direction. This is because it is the producer role that takes primary responsibility for the shape, content and distribution strategies that define a broadcast project and bring it into being.

The article has begun with a sketch of two different producers' careers – in Andrea Michell's case from the 1980s; in Cathy Henkel's case from the early 1990s – and will go on to compare and contrast the experiences and skill-sets required by disruption in the screen production environment. Their responses to the digitisation of their industry, video on demand (VoD), and a new depth and breadth of engagement with the audience have resulted in both producers becoming entrepreneurs (Dereziwicz, 2015). Providing a context for this comparative study, attention will first be paid to technological and communications convergence, and to the implications of this for the screen industries.

Disruption in the screen industries

This section will examine the notions of convergence, participation, interactivity and disruption, using Henry Jenkins' work over the past dozen years or so as a pertinent starting point. Jenkins' (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* argues for a novel 'relationship between three concepts – media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence' (2006, p. 2). Jenkins goes on to define convergence as:

The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of media experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes. (2006, pp. 2–3)

Around the time that Jenkins was writing *Convergence Culture*, Andrew Blau (2005) authored: *Deep Focus: A Report on the Future of Independent Media*, predicting that 'A new generation of media-makers and viewers are emerging which could lead to a sea change in how media is made and consumed' (2005, p. 3). Blau's work arose out of a collaborative engagement of six independent San Francisco media organisations with facilitator group the Global Business Network (GBN), trying to identify the characteristics of the emerging transmedia, participatory media world. By 2014, Jenkins, in 'Rethinking "Rethinking Convergence/Culture"' (which served as something of a 'right of reply' essay to a special issue of *Cultural Studies: Rethinking Convergence/Culture*), had identified that some media industries had managed to acknowledge audience demands for participation in ways that were 'largely rhetorical, with mechanisms offering only limited and mostly meaningless ways of entering the process', whereas other manifestations of convergence media provided evidence of 'significant shifts ... providing the people greater voice and influence in the [media consumption] decisions that impact their everyday lives' (Jenkins 2014, p. 271). It is this latter form of audience engagement that links through to the disruptive potential of emerging forms of media production and distribution.

The notion of convergence culture, and its allied revolution of convergence technologies (of which the smartphone/camera/voice recorder/map/computer is a telling example), anticipates the creation of unexpected and uncertain forms of media expression and consumption. Busse (in Stein et al., 2014) talks about ‘the many and myriad ways in which media spreads, often against all odds and all too often in unpredictable and exciting ways’ (2014, p. 154). At the same time, Jenkins’ co-authored reconceptualisation of convergence culture, *Spreadable Media* (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013) champions a political, disruptive element: ‘those who are most prepared to embrace spreadability have often been the people with the least to lose from changing the current system’ (2013, p. 293). Ford, one of Jenkins’ co-authors on *Spreadable Media*, notes that ‘one of the messages we hoped to convey is how important audience circulation activities are surrounding media content that doesn’t “go viral” but that deeply resonates within a particular community, as well as some of the complications that happen when content spreads outside those communities’ borders’ (in Stein et al. 2014, p. 162). He goes on to argue that one aim of the book was to:

Look at positives, negatives and potentials of how new and expanded cultural processes of communicating and circulating content – ways in which active audiences (including, but far from only including, various fandoms) are communicating with and around media content – are addressing those imbalances. And, as well, we wanted to question how those working in the media and marketing industries might likewise seek to create methods that allow them to have greater respect for, and better serve, their audiences. (2014, p. 164)

In response to debates around the importance of audience engagement, Jenkins (2014, p. 283) argues that there is a crucial difference between audience ‘interactivity’ and the ‘participatory’ audience: ‘interactivity is a property often designed and programmed into the technology and thus is much more likely to be under the control of media producers’. Thus interactivity can be positioned as a ‘technical affordance’, in line with the investigation by Leiner and Quiring (2008). Jenkins (2014, p. 283), by contrast, constructs participation as ‘a property of the surrounding culture [that] is often something communities assert through their shared engagement with technologies’. He suggests that his personal work focuses on ‘cultural practices that emerge around and often reshape the technological infrastructure’ (2014, p. 283).

Jenkins’ views on the crucial role of participatory audiences in unsettling the established norms concur with those of O’Flynn (2012), a Canadian film theorist. O’Flynn (2012, p. 152) argues that ‘the impact of social media and the rise of participatory strategies of engagement have positioned audiences as collaborators and creators who can expect an immediacy of response and the opportunity for agency’. The implication of these arguments is that participatory culture may be driving the expansion of technological possibilities; building demand for interactivity; impacting content production; and forging new connections with producers. One impact of these dynamics is major industry disruption.

Gaining finance for a screen production used to involve active engagement between producers, the commissioners of content (via studio, broadcast organisation or grant-based funding) and the broadcasters or distributors. Each of these parties might involve other players to increase the chances of success, but all of them had a role to play in the screen production industry. This accepted formula has now been challenged by the disruptive tendencies of Web 2.0 interactivity and the internet's capacity

to support an immediate dialogue and exchange with and between a global audience via Web 2.0 [with] conversations between audiences and content creators via multiple platforms including blogs, social media platforms and wikis, where the exchange can be immediate, archives and networked online (O'Flynn 2012, p. 148).

O'Flynn (2012, p. 143) notes that the same sets of technologies and practices are 'blurring prior divisions between fiction and non-fiction, text and paratext, director and audience'. Notably, in Flynn's assessment, and in the practice of disruptive screen production, the producers talk directly to audiences, sidelining commissioners, broadcasters and distributors.

Disruptive audience engagement involves far more than the strategies used by 'smaller Australian producers [that] tend to use YouTube and Vimeo for trailers and, typically cross-promote their films online using Facebook and Twitter' (Cunningham, Silver & McDonnell, 2010). It not only disrupts the industry model; it has the potential to disrupt the industry process. As Henkel notes below, crowdfunding has become one of the most important 'freedom streams' of income generation, supporting the creation of audience-engaged programming and sidestepping other content-influencers. This audience-producer nexus speaks in part to a 2004 observation by John Hartley that 'we lose the ability to have any real influence over the directions that our culture takes if we do not find ways to engage in active dialogue with media industries' (Hartley, cited in Robinson 2013, p. 5). Arguably, crowdfunding and Web 2.0 interactivity have together provided a significant impetus for audiences to bypass media industries, talking directly with producers and wresting some control and influence over cultural direction. This brief discussion of the gathering momentum of convergence (technology), participation (audience), interactivity (technical affordance) and disruption (industry) serves as a background for Henkel's and Michell's shared investigations into the impacts that these changes have wrought upon their very different screen production careers.

Career trajectories and audience engagement in the presence of disruption

Henkel's debut television documentary, *Heroes of our Time* (Henkel and Marciniak, 1991), the first production to provide an insider's perspective of Greenpeace direct action interventions, was shot on 16mm film. The project was fully subsidised through the federal government's film production facility, Film Australia. It took less than one year to make, and was shown at the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals and

broadcast on ABC television. Henkel had no direct contact with, or feedback from, the television audience and no say in how the film was subsequently distributed. This was a typical mainstream path of the day for documentary filmmakers, and it build upon a unique opportunity and a moment in time. Henkel and her co-director, Catherine Marciniak, had unique access to Greenpeace; the story was topical and in the national interest; and the directors had a good pitch: revealing the secret world of passionate young campaigners willing to risk everything to protect the environment. Henkel and Marciniak were also prepared to hand over the role of producer to Film Australia, which provided all production costs but also held all the rights.

Michell had a more step-by-step entry into her career as a film-maker. Starting out as a print journalist, but attracted by television production, she eventually 'broke into' the BBC via an appointment to its staff newspaper, *Ariel*. From there she applied for secondments and attachments to production teams, including the (then) household staple viewing *Nationwide* program (Brunsdon, 1978; Morley, 1980). Michell went on to work on the legal affairs magazine program *Out of Court*, which drew on her professional journalism expertise and gave her the opportunity to begin a career as a director. It was a difficult time to enter the media, compared with today, with far fewer channels and outlets. Although the BBC at the time had a reputation for providing informal opportunities to aspiring program makers, Michell's entry into full time television production coincided with 1980s Thatcherism and severe cuts to all public enterprises including the national broadcaster. In order to continue making television, Michell had to resign her staff position, accept a reduced salary, and move to short term contracts. As the BBC closed its own production departments, it had to ramp up its commissioning from independent companies, casualising the industry and increasing the precariousness and uncertainty of a production career. In this challenging environment, Michell found regular work as a documentary producer for BBC TV and Channel 4, including contributing to the series *Tall Stories* about New York skyscrapers, the environmental series *Nature* and the injustice series *Taking Liberties*. Gradually, 'the difference between documentarians and journalists' (Kasson, 2010) and Michell's move into the dramatisation of factual stories saw her setting up her own London-based production company Bravura Films, which since 2002 has often partnered with larger companies in order to deliver commissioned productions.

In the early stages of their production careers, both Henkel and Michell needed to be hyper-aware of the agendas of the funding agencies (in Henkel's case, Film Australia) and commissioners (in Michell's case, the people who held the key decision-making roles at the BBC and Channel 4). Audience reaction to their films was important, but audience engagement (beyond being anticipated in the structure and content of the program itself) was minimal. The contemporary picture is very different.

In 2014, Henkel returned to the subject matter of her first production, with her feature length documentary about direct action, *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* (Henkel, 2014). Like *Heroes of Our Time*, it tells the story of young people with passion and zeal prepared to take enormous risks to protect the environment. However, everything else about the documentary distances *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* in 2014 from *Heroes of our Time* in 1991. Shot using digital formats, the latest documentary took four years from concept to completion, was released theatrically via a producer-led distribution model,

had no television pre-sale – although it was featured on SBS Movies (Pfeiffer, 2013), targeted online distribution platforms and was subsequently re-cut into a TV series with 13 half-hour episodes. Henkel was writer, director and one of three producers on the project, and retained more than 65 per cent of the rights in the work. The finance came primarily from what she calls ‘the freedom streams of funding’: private investment, philanthropy, sponsorship and crowdfunding (Screen Forever, 2013).

The adoption of a freedom funding model represented a deliberate decision by the *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* producers. It responded to an environment of declining government subsidies for film and television production, and a very small proportion of such funds available for social issue and environmental feature documentaries. The producers also chose to adopt this funding approach as a proactive choice, since it offered greater creative freedom to filmmakers, and gave producers more licence and freedom regarding how the project was released and marketed. Private investment, philanthropy and sponsorship do not carry the same implications for creative intervention and control of distribution that accompanies government funding, and traditional broadcast and distribution deals. Crowdfunding mechanisms offer complete creative freedom from the donors, who are more excited about wanting to see the film made rather than about having a say in how the content is approached or the final product is distributed. For a backer, the existence of the film to be produced is the desired return on investment; there is no requirement for the film to be a sound investment or to make ‘a profit’.

For Andrea Michell, one of the key drivers for change has been the globalisation of the industry and the comparatively borderless audience. This has led to more international co-production, and to her sense that there is currently more money and more opportunity in drama than in factual production. One of Michell’s past successes as a development executive on *Forgiven* (Michell, 2007), produced by independent production company betty tv, involved the dramatic re-portrayal of a true story about a mother who takes her husband back after he has abused their daughter. The lead actress, Lucy Cohu, won an International Emmy award for her performance. Over the past few years, Michell has increasingly been working with the international broadcaster and distributor Keshet, the company behind the globally renowned drama series *Homeland* (Zanger, 2015), but predominantly concentrating on adapting Israeli-originated drama series formats, including international hit series *The A Word* (on the BBC and distributed worldwide) and comedy drama series *Loaded*, for the UK audience. As co-production is changing, so are co-production partners, and Netflix, AMC, Amazon, Hulu and HBO (for example) are all funding drama series and, increasingly, factual content production as well.

Globalisation is just one of the many manifestations of the impact of the internet on screen industries. As Henkel notes (2016), early in her career producers had no alternative but to seek broadcast and distribution partners to reach audiences. They simply could not do it themselves. The primary ambition of the documentary filmmaker was to secure festival screenings and convince a public broadcaster to screen their film in prime time. When YouTube and other online platforms for user-created content placed distribution models in the hands of the public, they gave audiences more choices and control regarding when, where and what content they would consume.

YouTube, Vimeo and other online distribution channels erupted in the new terrain and audiences became content creators and the controllers of their content selection and viewing experience, giving rise to a new class of presenter, broadcaster and producer who would (1) share revenue with the platform (e.g. a share in advertising income); (2) sell things from the platform (e.g. products and services aligned with them or their show); and (3) attract the interest of mainstream media who might then pay to recruit the presenter, the idea or the show to their channel or platform. Examples of this genre include *The Katering Show* (Alice, 2016) and *PewDiePie* (Abidin, 2017).

With the advent of video streaming, the public broadcast channel controller was no longer the primary curator of voices available to audiences. For producers of content, new opportunities opened through which they could reach audiences directly via online channels and platforms. Producer-led cinema distribution options were also emerging that bypassed traditional distribution partners and enabled producers to take control of reaching their audiences.

Changed funding models

These seismic changes to accessing video on demand were also linked to fractures in screen production funding models. The Australian federal government's willingness to allocate subsidies to encourage local content production and the local production industry diminished considerably. Although it had its critics at the time of its introduction (Cole, 2009), the 'producer offset scheme' was introduced as an alternative to subsidy, enabling producers to secure government rebates on qualifying Australian spend of up to 40 per cent of the cost for feature films and 20 per cent for television and other projects. Not only is it a secure government contribution to a project's budget, but it gives producers equity they wouldn't otherwise have had, and more options when putting the finance together (Screen Australia, 2017).

State governments also encouraged the diversification of funding models by providing incentives to producers to subsidise filmmaking in specific locations. Most recently, these trajectories have reached their natural conclusion with Graham Mason, CEO of funding body Screen Australia, recently noting at the Australian International Documentary Conference that:

If your funding model for your project, or worse, your entire business, relies majorly on federal and state funding, then you are not coming from a position of strength, or in most cases, logic. It is not going to be a real or good plan or strategy and you are unlikely to be here in the mid, let alone long, term ... I say again: public money from public broadcasters, from us, from other government agencies, will not keep you alive. (Mason, 2017)

Whereas Cathy Henkel was responding to the opening of new opportunities for autonomy and agency through raising more of her own funding, Andrea Michell was changing the ways in which she wanted to tell stories. Although it is difficult to discern whether she was responding to, or in the vanguard of, a move to the dramatisation of factual content, the shift Andrea Michell made in moving from factual content to dramatic programs demanded a further period of reduced income and employment

uncertainty. This mirrored the adjustment required when she had left her BBC staff job, and gone on contract. Andrea Michell describes her 'retraining' as a drama producer as requiring a drop in remunerated production work to three days a week while she developed the new skills required by drama production. She notes that periods of risk and precarious uncertainty are a requirement of the industry. To her mind, every three or so years there is a disruption in the preferred style of programming – moving, for example, from documentary soaps to fix-rig factual series such as 24 hours in the accident and emergency department of a major hospital.

Although she sees many issues with the casualisation of the industry, Michell suggests that monolithic broadcast organisations such as the BBC have had problems in the past with staff not wanting to respond to changing audience tastes, and instead wanting to make programs in their own way on their own terms without regard for emerging areas of audience demand. This narrow focus risks trapping legacy media in a legacy model of broadcasting. It is exactly this perspective that has prompted impatience from the (few) remaining government funding bodies, as Mason, CEO of Screen Australia notes:

Diversity makes sense, morally, culturally, creatively, and commercially ... to reach the audience – the whole audience, not just the old audience – you need to understand the audience. It's time to think 'audience first' ... As traditional TV and film distribution plays increasingly to an ageing demographic, we will want to, and be required to, look at things that speak to younger Australians. So if you are still thinking in an old-school way, you will be working in an ever-shrinking pond. (Mason, 2017)

The implication of Mason's talk, of Michell's commitment to retraining and of Henkel's desire to adopt freedom funding streams is that contemporary producers need to pre-empt the market demand for content, developing new skills and competencies as required and positioning themselves ready to respond to emerging audience tastes and viewers' demand for innovative product.

The old skills remain useful, however. As Michell (2016) notes,

writers respond very much to the fact I can get them access to great worlds, I can introduce them to ideas, I've met so many people, I know a huge amount from my years as a journalist and documentary-maker so writers find it very stimulating to be provoked by things that are real and really give them something to go on (see also Isabel, 2016).

Michell (2016) goes on to say:

I think for audiences there's an extra purpose when something is inspired by a true story or is real, they know, 'Oh this is an authentic human thing I'm finding out about', and I think it makes it feel it's worth watching. So most of the best writers really do a lot of research and they don't sit and make it all up.

This view is very much in tune with Henkel's perspective and experience. Although *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* (2014) began life with a cinema release, and therefore

qualified for the federal government's 40% producer offset, only 9% of the project's budget came from direct government subsidy in the form of an investment grant from the Queensland state government film funding agency. Because it is a refundable tax offset (rebate) underpinned by income tax legislation, the producer offset represents a new form of government support, in line with its strategy of reducing direct subsidies and investments. The producers of *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* took full advantage of this option while seeking to diversify their funding strategies for the remaining 68% of the budget. (The tax offset is only for qualifying Australian spend, and resulted in a rebate representing 32% of the budget.)

Using social media and online audience engagement strategies learned from her previous productions *The Burning Season* (2008) and *Show Me the Magic* (Henkel, 2012), Henkel and her team aimed from the start to make *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* an expansive project with multiple partners, including private investors, philanthropists, a range of corporate partners and an innovative distribution plan and partner. This enabled a producer-led distribution strategy, and garnered production and distribution partners in Singapore for the TV series, while also attracting support from Microsoft Partners in Learning, DeforestAction, Kanopy and Filme fur die Erde (Films for the Earth) in Switzerland. *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* went on to be translated into French, Italian, German and Indonesian, and was selected to be one of five documentaries to be featured as part of Earth Day 2017, 22 April.

In keeping with the social impact objective of Henkel's film, the cinema release and subsequent screenings and broadcasts of the film motivated some audience members to want to support a number of the Borneo-based projects that had been filmed for the production. One of the *Rise of the Eco-Warriors* producers, Mark White, set up a purpose-built crowd funding site, Rainforest Connections, to enable audiences to contribute to projects they encountered in the film, including the Sintang Orangutan Rescue Centre and the village of Tembak. This direct engagement with audiences resulted in \$20,250 being raised during the cinema season towards the building of a high school in Tembak and a further \$7550 to fund a 28-Day Palm Oil Challenge. In 2015, the crowd funding platform was re-branded PlanetFunder, and donations for the projects seen in the film now total over \$50,000, with flow-on donations to other environmental projects. A deeper level of audience engagement also occurred, with people embarking on their own fundraising ventures and joining eco-tourism trips to the village to hand over the funds themselves (Roorda, 2017). PlanetFunder has to date raised \$480,000 for over 200 projects from approximately 4000 donors in 10 countries. (PlanetFunder, 2017). This constitutes audience in-depth engagement with the reality portrayed in Henkel's documentary.

Andrea Michell's (2016) view is that commissioners and broadcasters used to resist co-productions and fought to keep editorial control so that stories could be told:

just in their voice. I think we've learnt through not just the streaming services but through having series exported back and forth between cultures, we've somehow in the last two, maybe five years, there's been a slow realisation that actually we like each other's [voices] ... we do understand the universality of stories (2016).

At the same time, the disruptors themselves are adopting new ways of making content. For example, YouTube has started a curated service, which involves the channel commissioning content, and acting as gatekeepers themselves behind a paywall. Andrea Michell notes that the Video on Demand platforms Netflix and Amazon, and soon Apple TV and Google TV (and maybe Facebook too), have resulted in more funding outlets for factual documentary program makers. She says that Netflix looks at the data, the metrics, on UK series it has on its platform and uses that information to drive funding decisions. A producer friend of hers had the experience of Netflix looking up audience figures and commissioning another fully funded series of a show previously made with UK network C5. This change means that program makers no longer have to depend on traditional broadcaster outlets: they increasingly have other funding options due to the new focus on audience engagement. 'It's evolving really fast,' she says, with 'far more diverse voices coming through'.

Discussion and conclusion

These two producers, from different countries and with different professional histories, have nevertheless found common ground in their need to continually reinvent their business models and upgrade their skills to maintain relevance at a time of exponential change in the production, distribution and monetisation of broadcast content. An overarching commitment to audience engagement, both in terms of the content and the impact of the stories, means that their stories start with factual lived experience, whether or not this goes on to be captured through documentary or dramatic means. At a time of rising political and international tensions, these producers construct the streaming services and the internet as having allowed people to engage with the quintessential human experience implicit in many fact-based stories. In some cases, this encounter with screen-based representations of real life has prompted viewers to become activists, raising money and travelling to see for themselves the actuality of what had been portrayed online. For both producers, the implication of this disruption is that audiences are demanding more from their viewing experiences, seeking out the content and voices with which they wish to engage and pulling them into their lives.

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