

Consumers understand that media is changing quickly, but many organizations are struggling to keep up, says communications coach Bob Hughes, in this overview of some of what you need to know about new media.

Newspapers are quickly becoming multimedia providers. TV channels understand they need highly interactive sites to keep their audiences interested. And your ipod filled with downloaded audio is making music radio stations obsolete.

How you get your information and entertainment is changing fast, and you're probably changing with it. But not everyone's making the most of it, although it has never been easier or cheaper to make good quality audio or video.

High speed broadband is responsible for a lot of the changes. In media, bittorrent has driven major changes. The peer to peer network provides (mostly illegal) access to the latest movies, TV shows, games applications, audio books and music. Downloaders are infringing copyright, of course and the licensing authorities are succeeding in getting some heavy penalties for from the courts, including jail time and fines of hundreds of thousands of dollars. But with some estimates putting torrents at 60% or more of all net traffic there's an epidemic of copyright lawlessness about.

You can find almost any recent TV show, movie or software on bittorrent. There's always a chance that it'll be infected with a trojan, but the variety of material is making it worthwhile for many otherwise law abiding citizens.

The notorious download site The Pirate Bay lists both Rolling Stone magazine's top 500 songs and the 'best 1000 songs for the last 30 years' as among their top 100 music downloads. Grab them, pop them on the ipod or your media player and you have your own golden oldies channel. And if you don't like a song you remove it from your play list.

No wonder commercial radio's scrambling to find other business models.

Social networking sites and citizen journalism, where the public provides the content, have changed forever the traditional model of big media providing content from the top down.

Flickr.com, Yahoo's photo sharing site, now has 2 billion photos on display, many of them free for non commercial use, under Creative Commons licensing.

But where broadband excels is in providing video on demand.

Perhaps the most popular amateur video so far, Judson Laippley's Evolution of Dance is now up to 65 million views on YouTube. See why at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMH0bHeiRNq>

One young Sydney woman who I've coached is also turning into a star thanks to the free video website.

Singer songwriter Daisy Daet (who performs as MizzDAIZYD) has won an international audience for her songs through YouTube – she's had around a million views of her videos.

She started making the videos in her bedroom in Glebe using the built in camera on her iMac. She hoped to score a recording contract. Now she's not so sure she needs it. With fans in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, and Lithuania, as well as the bigger markets, Daisy has a global audience.

She's now selling her songs through iTunes, and sharpening her marketing strategies.

You can see her videos - <http://www.youtube.com/quizelladay>

There's an important downside for organisations' media management - activists who don't like you can use new media to spread their views, very effectively. The case of Monsignor Geoff Baron who resigned from his position at St Patrick's in Melbourne after being shown abusing skateboards on YouTube is a warning. The prevalence of video cameras in phones means you should always regard yourself as being on the record.

The problem that I face repeatedly in providing audio and video podcasts is that despite the rapid growth of great new media content from amateurs, web development professionals may not be keeping up. This is partly because the demand for these skills has exploded. The Olivier Internet Job Index, (which we do media relations for) tracked Multimedia Internet and Graphics job ads on the net increasing by 70% in the past 12 months.

The Web Standards Group's email list gives an insight into how many developers are struggling with the challenges of the rapidly changing demands of the web. The Web Standards Group and its informed and helpful membership does a lot to help them.

Some of the problems are almost laughable – there are company web developers who aren't allowed to access audio or video links from their work. Some IT departments are confused about how Mac and Windows machines might access multimedia material. (Using Flash based multimedia is one answer) And the issue of the amount of bandwidth that multimedia chews up still frightens some IT departments. In one case recently I was told that while a company had enough bandwidth to accommodate video on their website it would take months to change the systems to be able to deliver it.

The important question is how you create material people want to see and hear.

The hardware is cheap – you can set up a good quality audio studio for less than \$500 (plus a computer).

Video cameras are remarkably inexpensive too. Professional High Definition cameras that cost tens of thousands of dollars a few years ago are now available for less than five thousand. Most people already have basic video editing software like Windows Movie Maker on their computers, and very sophisticated video editing software can be had for a few hundred dollars.

The chief issues in creating multimedia are around attention to detail. That's always been what sets the media professionals apart – the willingness to take the time to get everything right, and constantly checking quality.

However if your message is sufficiently compelling or timely people will want to see or hear it. One of the benefits of audio-only podcasts is how quick they are to do – a 24 hour turnaround is easy in many cases.

We did some pre-election audio only podcasts for the Property Council of Australia which got some attention.

http://propertycouncil.gravitymax.com.au/advoc/page.asp?622=286770&E_Page=17720&article=true

One simple way to make an interesting presentation is by combining an audio recording with powerpoint slides. There's an example here from a presentation by internet marketer Fred Schebesta

<http://www.netcastnow.net/db/onlinemarketing.shtml>

And this is how the Sydney Morning Herald used the same technique to profile the electorate of Lindsay.

<http://www.smh.com.au/multimedia/2007/national/lindsay-electorate-profile/index.html>

Old media isn't dead. The only communications medium that has ever become obsolete may be the telegram. We just keep adding more media into the mix. While Google's targeted advertising has irreversibly moved advertising away from big media broadcasting messages to mass audiences to a narrow cast model, it doesn't mean the end for traditional media managers.

They know how to turn consumer attention into revenue, and how to monetise content. Those skills will always be in demand.

What's likely to happen next?

New generation phones will mean that sales and training videos will be delivered to handsets.

We'll see geographically targeted advertising on phones very soon.

The three dimensional web may not be far away. You'll have some sort of visual display that allows you to overlay reality you're looking at with web based information. And you'll be navigating by gesture.

Some Links:

Who has time to take it all in? Here's a couple of top sites to keep you up to date on the most interesting developments.

Ted.com says it's devoted to ideas worth spreading. The innovative high level thinkers they show on video cover Technology Education and Design (the Ted in their title) and offer many insights.

<http://www.ted.com/index.php>

Your easiest access is probably through the open source 'video on the net player' Miro which opens up large resource of other free videos. It turns your computer into an internet TV, as they say.

<http://www.getmiro.com/>

ITConversations has presentations and interviews from perceptive thinkers like Malcolm Gladwell, Steve Wozniak and Lawrence Lessig, as well as many technical experts.

<http://itc.conversationsnetwork.org/index.html>

The weekly This Week in Tech show is one of the most popular podcasts with informed and provocative commentary on developments in computing, business and new media.

<http://twit.tv/twit>

and there's Wired – an authoritative source on technology and society

<http://www.wired.com/>

About the Author

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Bob Hughes, December 2007