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student has corrupted something. It also allows all the machines in the lab to operate overnight as a render farm, and it holds a library for sound effects. We also have a number of removable hard drives.

Getting Involved in the Industry

I sometimes get calls from parents who tells me they have a kid that is the most amazing animator, or game programmer, or wants to make television, etc. Their first question is “how can they enter the field”. The second question is “are there any jobs when they graduate or will they have to go somewhere else”. The two are actually connected. There is a variety of formal training available and useful as a starting point for those wishing to enter the field. While screen production is highly technical, and is referred to as an industry, it is an art form as well as a creative team sport. Like dance or music many with raw talent need to be trained in order for a few to emerge with the abilities to meet the challenge. The reality is many are in these courses because they have an interest, and it is only through taking the course that their talents emerge as being sufficiently high to compete in the industry. Some don’t enter the industry per say, but stay in higher education. Many conclude its not for them. But what of those in WA who wish to enter production, particularly those who have pursued a vocational training path?

I always explain there are no “jobs” anywhere on the planet, not just in WA. You will never see an ad “director required for feature film”. The entertainment industry, at every level, including production, is made up from people who get most jobs through networking. It is a field where skills are built through participation in production, and in nearly all cases this begins as a volunteer assistant in some form. Hanging out and being useful is the rule. **It's not who you know, but who knows you, and what you can do.**

Most people in the industry work under contract on a production by production basis, building a lifetime career of self-employment. It is a hard road, but if this is what someone wants to do, and they are resilient, and totally committed they can do it anywhere including WA where in fact there is now quite of lot of production happening. Many in the industry work anywhere in the world but live in WA between productions.

National training priorities tend to stress individual competency development to meet (national) industry needs of employers. This model can apply in industries where there are traineeship/ apprenticeship schemes, centralised/ unionised industries, a regular advertised need for entry level people, structured employee advancement, and so on.

Basically industries with many employees, on-going employment, and some form of career path. The service sector of the Film Television, Radio, and Multimedia Industry does to varying degrees fit this model, but the screen production landscape does not.

Such a *training to be an employee* approach does not place a high priority on screen production team germination and development, self initiated content creation, or business development. Few graduates of such programs have the ethos and abilities to create new production, or start their own sustainable production businesses. To be effective and useful in screen production graduates must achieve a “*Plug and Play*” status. Someone is hired today, and tomorrow they have to pull their full weight.

What seems to be missing in many school programs? What’s the most important thing??? You do need usable gear, and enough for everyone, but its not using the latest version of software.

From where I sit understanding how to tell a great story is at the top of the list as is team based production of *watchable* output. The teaching community gets all hung up on the idea of text, and its analysis. Only they know what that means. It means everything to everyone, and nothing specific to anyone. That’s OK, but for screen production its storytelling, and the kids understand that term as does the industry. Learning how to use the gear is a means not an outcome. From the very beginning of how to use a camera is the telling of a story- That’s the outcome. What’s a good story? Why is it a good story? How do you tell a good story? What distracts from the story? What’s the view point of the story? Who is interested in the story? etc, etc???

It seems to me in many school programs there is far to much time spent on how to use something on disconnected exercises, and far to little time spent on how to tell cohesive stories. **Teaching/ training that doesn't focus on story telling as the primary goal is not preparing students for the industry.** Learning how to use a camera or an editing or animation program will not prepare someone for a job. Being able to understand how to create characters, and tell a compelling story will.

Further, the story has to be created within a production team environment. Those who wish to enter the field need experience in the entire workflow process. A production company is a small inter-dependant team of specialists, that share an understanding of the entire process from creation, through pre-production, production, post-production, and in many cases into product delivery. Ideas associated with any aspect of production will effect and alter other aspects of



production. For instance, concept, story, target market, and design will have a greater importance at the start of the production cycle. The production will build on the concept work, but through the production process, the design will undergo re-evaluation, review and redesign of the original concepts. Production will be created based on concept ideas, script requirements, and plans, but there will be many changes throughout the storytelling process as it is developed and produced.

In-class production should attempt to simulate this production process so closely as to be nearly indistinguishable from a design and production studio. Training delivery must not only create industry work practice in its component parts, but also an entire workflow from production concept to execution. As such, each participant is required to demonstrate competencies individually, as well as within a production team that follows typical workflow practiced in a production company.

Finally the productions must have viability that accurately reflects and compares in some measure to product in the market place and the real world. If all the skills have been achieved, but the output is unwatchable its missed the mark.

About the Industry in WA.

Firstly, there needs to be a clear understanding of the greater media industry. There are two loose groupings. Service providers, and original content producers. There is a lot known about the former. Essentially they are the people listed in the phone book. Some of them are large with a workforce that expands and contracts with what the company is doing. Essentially they provide a service to a customer under some form of contract. They might be a broadcaster, internet provider, web site developer, etc. These employees may create content but under contract to a customer.

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I Want to Make Movies (continued)

I have a greater interest in the later. This group is much harder to quantify as it is in independent production. They create original content that is published or distributed. While there are some medium to large Australian screen production companies (primarily on the eastern seaboard), in WA it is a community of smaller sole proprietor or partnership companies that expand and contract with their production needs. They may go from two or three people while they are developing a production, to a dozen during pre-production to a hundred during production, back to a dozen during postproduction and once again to 2-3 people while they are putting the next production deal together. All employment is under contract for specific production. Little of the WA production is for a local market. Much is for the national market, and most production is produced for international release and through deal structures that include a variety of global regional distributors. In WA this has been in areas such as children's production, animation, documentaries, lower budget features and mini-series, and so on. There is substantial production in WA, but it follows this model.

Increasingly exploitable content is also created by individuals who may (or may not) work in consort with others, all of whom may invest their efforts to create their own shared IP. They are no less professional because they are unpaid or little paid. These content creators invest their time because they have faith in the team, and the ideas. At the same

time the individuals in the team accept contract employment in traditional cash based production (or other jobs) to support themselves while they invest time in none cash based production.

Team members are involved because they are passionate about the subject, and the team. And they see their involvement as furthering their career in the screen industry. Whatever cash they need is self funded. The benefits to the team are in skills development, portfolio creation, screen credits, and an expectation that if the production has a future they will be compensated retrospectively, and involved in future production. These productions will often represent the work of a team that then attracts other funded production based on the quality of the team's efforts. These productions can grow into work groups to form into production companies. Over the past few years at FTI many of these teams have included people who are still in school.

While collaboration is a key competency, central to its effectiveness in screen production are the on-going loose connections of a greater network of people who have awareness of each other, and their abilities. This approach has successfully operated at FTI for the past 30 years. Numerous professionals have entered the industry through working (usually starting as volunteers) on the various independent, and professional development productions created under the FTI umbrella.

The age at which that hanging out begins has gotten younger in recent times. Currently there are a few 15-

18 year olds that regularly work on productions. This is not workplace training. They become members of FTI and get involved on production crews. There is a student membership, and some schools are now corporate sponsors which provides a means for their students to get extremely low cost membership.

FTI embraces anyone in WA interested in independent screen production, those at (or recently at) all the WA universities, TAFE, and those still in high school who are keen to be involved in the community. It provides production opportunities for emerging screen content creators with a wide variety of skill levels that, depending on the program, have either implicit and/or explicit professional development. FTI offers weekend workshops and professional development for all ages and skill levels in animation, games production, puppetry, and all aspects of television and film production. The national recognised fulltime programs at FTI also provide an immersive, intense, real production environment. FTI also operates a highly effective VET in School program that includes a VET in Summer School. Over 15 days in January participants create several productions, and achieve a Cert. II in MM [video production].

The FTI Community brings together the experienced with the inexperienced within a loose and dynamic construct to form an intergenerational domain of knowledge, and abilities to create commercially focused production. It provides a catalyst for networking, content creation, and production business development.



Join us and Jeff Newman to celebrate successes of students in The Technology & Enterprise Learning Area at the 2004 Value Adding Quest Awards Night

Date: Wednesday October 27 2004

Venue: Music Auditorium

Churchlands SHS

20 Lucca Street Churchlands

Time: 6.30pm-9.00pm

Light refreshments will be served

RSVP

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