



FILM, TV & GAMES CONFERENCE 2015

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Session 9: The Future for Online Video Talent

This report summarises a session that took place at the BSAC Film, TV & Games Conference 2015.

This session was introduced by Jon Gisby, who provided an overview of the current market and future prospects for the online talent sector.

This was followed by a panel discussion, featuring a number of online talent stars, platform managers and agents, who discussed their experiences on working within this sector, how their careers had developed to date and how they saw the future prospects for the sector. This was chaired by Henry Bonsu, and featured Stuart 'Ashens' Ashen, Daz Black, Edward East, Rich Keith and Claire Tavernier.

Summaries of other sessions from the day and a complete report of the Conference are available from www.bsac.uk.com

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ABOUT BSAC

The British Screen Advisory Council (BSAC) is an independent, industry funded membership body for the audiovisual sector.

We uniquely bring together the widest possible range of interests, knowledge and contacts to exchange ideas and information about business and policy issues. Our Members are invited to join on the basis of their personal qualities, experience and expertise, and are drawn from the major TV broadcasters, independent film and TV producers, distributors, exhibitors, US studios with major operations in the UK, trade associations, trades unions, training providers and new media companies, such as Google and Spotify.

Many of our activities take place privately, which enables business leaders to freely discuss the fast changing nature of the industry.

On policy, we provide opportunities for industry and policy makers to hear a breadth of viewpoints and, wherever possible, for the sector to speak with a single and authoritative voice. Over the years we have worked closely with the Treasury, HMRC, DCMS, BIS, IPO, the European Commission, WTO, and WIPO.

We also enjoy the support of Associate Members, which are businesses with a particular interest in the sector. These include legal firms, accountancy practices and investment management firms, and are an important port of call for obtaining views and expertise.

We commission and generate research and reports to underpin our work.

We host a series of events that are open to a broader invited audience. These include an annual Film, TV and Games Conference, an Interview Series and occasional seminars. These provide high quality debates and networking opportunities.

More information can be found at www.bsac.uk.com

THE FUTURE FOR ONLINE VIDEO TALENT

Business Overview: Jon Gisby, Adviser & EVP Business Development, Magine

Panel Chair: Henry Bonsu, Broadcaster

Stuart 'Ashens' Ashen, YouTube Star

Daz Black, Vine Star

Edward East, Founder, Billion Dollar Boy

Rich Keith, General Manager, TheYogscast

Claire Tavernier, Founder & MD, StoryTechLife



Henry Bonsu explained that the session would focus on the explosion of online video talent. It would be introduced by Jon Gisby, who would provide a breakdown of the sector and provide some context about the debates that were taking place.

Jon Gisby explained that, in addition to his work with Magine, a Swedish cloud-based TV platform, he was working with a number of broadcasters and early stage

businesses that were seeking solutions to shifting patterns of audience behaviour, namely that audiences were migrating online and using new devices, and the realisation that previous businesses models were no longer working.

His proposition was that online video distribution was the biggest opportunity for talent ever. Today, it would be hypothetically possible for somebody in the audience to film today's Conference and upload it onto the internet and for it to be viewed by a billion people by teatime. While this was still a developing sector, and monetisation models were still developing, it was already possible to reach a larger and more international audience with greater ease and in a shorter period of time than ever before.

Over recent years, something remarkable had happened to the audiovisual industries, namely that the TV set had gone from being the dominant domestic screen, which families would watch together, to being a small minority of the number of screens in a household: already, conventional TV sets accounted for less than a quarter of installed video receiving equipment in the average home, and even these would be connected to the internet in the very near future.

To put this into context, Jo Twist had earlier outlined how there were 86 LEGO blocks for every person on the planet; by 2020, some forecasters predicted that there would be 10 connected devices for every person in the world – and while a lot of these would be machines that spoke only to each other, a sizeable number of them

would be able to deliver video, which was something that would have an extraordinary impact upon user behaviours.

Although still in its infancy, online video content was already attracting gigantic audiences: it was estimated that YouTube had in excess of a billion users and Facebook was now achieving about 4 billion video views daily, a figure that had quadrupled over the past year. This was also an inherently international medium, with 80% of Facebook's users being based outside of North America. Consequently, it was possible for uploaded content to get a huge audience very quickly.

There was also a misconception that viewers were only watching short and unmonetisable clips of pandas. This was not the case, and the numbers showed that over 50% of time spent viewing content over tablets was of content that was over 30 minutes in length.

There was now a huge audience that was increasingly watching long-form premium content of a kind that would immediately be recognisable to conventional distributors and producers. This was also increasingly monetisable: the CEO of Omnicom had recently advised his clients to move 10-25% of their advertising budgets to online videos; Starcomm had recently announced that they would be redeploying \$500m from TV to online; and in the USA, Fox had recently issued a profit warning, announcing that their profits were likely to be \$500m lower than anticipated and citing as a cause the drift of advertisers and attention away from broadcast TV towards online video at a much faster rate than anticipated.

He observed that, in the traditional TV world, a lot of the inventory and money was not actually coming from TV budgets. In the UK, this year would be the first year at which more than 50% of advertising spend would be on digital forms of media. Particularly important was the development of programmatic trading, which automated the process and, by reaching and serving precisely targeted advertising very effectively, made it easy to monetise international audiences at massive scale.

So, online video had a very real ad-model, and advertising money was unsurprisingly following the attention very rapidly. It had taken broadcasting 40-50 years to invent a subscription model, but this had been a part of online video since day one, and new models were still developing. For example, Vessel, founded by the team that created Hulu, had realised that there was a potential audience who would pay a few dollars a month to have immediate access to content before it was released over free services, even for an exclusive period that might only last a day or two. YouTube had also announced that they would be introducing a subscription model. While these business models were quite familiar, they were now being applied over the internet incredibly rapidly and at scale as the market developed.

He summarised by explaining that this environment had created an enormous potential for new talent. For example, PewDiePie, a video games commentator, had 28m subscribers and had made \$4m last year – his girlfriend, Coodiepie, also had 4m subscribers in her own right. There was clearly a potential for content creators to find a fan base and business model, and this was just starting to happen very quickly and on a massive level.

He observed that Jamie Oliver had been one of the first mainstream starts to recognise the potential of this new medium: *Jamie's FoodTube* had been one of the most successful YouTube channels since it had first launched on YouTube about a year ago; Jamie Oliver had explicitly stated the desire to connect directly with his fans, without the intermediation of a broadcaster, and to directly work with brands and advertisers as part of the content in a way that was not possible on broadcast TV. This channel's success was a clear demonstration of the possibilities for building a franchise and a brand around talent in this space.

In addition, this space offered potential for aggregators. For example, *Machinima*, a video games channel, attracted audience of around 200m viewers. Last year, there had been a six month period over which multi-channel networks had attracted an average of more than a billion dollars per month in investment, so this was a huge space.

There were also generationally different patterns of behaviour. For example, his fourteen year old daughter currently subscribed to 200 YouTube channels, which she checked religiously, and this far from unusual for her peer group.

His final observation was that, just as talent could use online distribution methods to reach their audiences, so could brands and advertisers in their own right. One area, that was seeing considerable growth was that of branded content; this was exciting and relevant material, created and released by advertisers directly, that was designed to reinforce the core brand values. Advertisers had realised the possibility of advertising directly to their consumers, and also the potential benefits of reaching audiences that could be aggregated quickly and easily.



There were numerous successful examples of this: Red Bull were particularly prominent, but other examples included Burberry, who had recognised that much of their core audience loved independent music and so had decided to sponsor a lot of independent bands and to link with them over social media sites – this strategy had made them into one of the most liked and respected brands on Facebook.

Earlier today, Ben Keen had presented a breakdown of revenues into the global audiovisual sectors and provided a summary of how these had changed over the past decade. He predicted that, over the next ten years, the amounts of revenue going into online video would explode.

He concluded with a quotation from a digital content producer, “The TV industry is in denial. Consumers are not spending 20 hours a week watching TV. They’re spending 20 hours a week watching video on a screen.”

Henry Bonsu said that this sounded much more revolutionary than evolutionary. He asked who should be most afraid by these developments?



Jon Gisby said that the fundamentals were the same as they had always been: people needed to tell good stories well, build an audience and hopefully make some money out of it.

More broadly, he suspected that there were people in the room who had grown up listening to Radio Caroline – in the same way that he remembered growing up watching with Channel 4, back when it was a channel that you

had to watch with the door closed and your parents out of the room. He predicted that the current market for online talent was at a comparable level of development in that it was still very much a developing space, but was going to grow into something very big and very mainstream, in just the same way that Glastonbury had now become the annual summer outing of the Ofcom content board.

In answer to the question, this would take time, and business models and distribution technologies were not yet fully formed, so anybody in the latter third of their career could probably see this out. However, these new business models and methods of distributing content would become very real, the scale was massive, and the passion with which the audience identified with the content was totally inspiring.

Henry Bonsu introduced the panel, which included two online content stars and three industry specialists who managed talent and the relationships with channels, and showed a sizzle reel highlighting some of their work.

He observed that Daz Black had a large number of followers, and asked him to explain what he did.

Daz Black explained that he primarily produced content over Vine. This was an app and website which allowed users to create six second videos that looped – Vine had grown massively since launched, and there were now over 100m users worldwide.

Vine was very well suited to comedy clips, and his work was based mostly around characters and funny sketches.

Henry Bonsu asked Daz how he had started. He observed that Daz's showreel had included a spoof of *Jurassic Park*, where Daz had imitated the velociraptor's foot-tapping scene, which he had thought had been brilliant.

Daz Black explained that had wanted to create something linked to *Jurassic Park*, and this sketch had just come to him.

He loved performing and creating videos and, at first, had not really worried about how many people were watching him. He had originally started by uploading content onto YouTube before discovering and moving over to Vine – originally because

another content creator, who he followed, had made the same move. He had only had about 60 followers on YouTube, but people had really started following him after he had moved over to Vine.

Henry Bonsu asked Stuart ‘Ashens’ Ashen to explain his career.

Stuart ‘Ashens’ Ashen explained that he had also moved into the space by accident. Back in the Compuserve era, when downloading an online video over a dial-up connection had taken days, he had come across a dreadful rip-off of a new Sony product on eBay that he had thought looked amusingly tacky; he had bought one and improvised a five minute video about it, which he had released it online. This video had been linked to by *Beta* – a prominent newsletter of the time – and within days, 70,000 people had downloaded it. Realising that there was potential, he had continued making and releasing videos, becoming an early adopter of YouTube shortly after it had launched, and ten years later, here he was.

Henry Bonsu asked Ashens when he had realised that he had something viable as a career, or had, similarly to Daz, he simply loved making videos and not really cared how many people were following him?

‘**Ashens**’ had first realised the viability when the audience had started to shoot up, which had grown much more rapidly once people had been able to stream content, rather than having to download WMV files. Recognising the trend, and as he had been having fun, he decided to stay in the space to see what would happen in the hope that someone would find out a way to monetise it.

Henry Bonsu asked Daz and Ashens what had happened when their figures had really started to increase? – Of course, it was now easy to track the number of viewers, but at what point had someone tapped them on the shoulder, and offered them a way to make some money out of their work.

‘**Ashens**’ said that he had not really had that moment because, as he had been involved in the scene from the start, he had really been riding the wave throughout. However, he had first realised just how big the sector had become when the BBC had started running stories about the sector; then a producer from Hat Trick Productions had contacted him and asked him to work on a project with them – they had wanted to harness his audience as well as getting him to collaborate on some of their more traditional talent-led projects.

Daz Black had said that Vine had only been launched a couple of months before he had started using it, so he really had been there at its start. A big difference between Vine and YouTube was that Vine did not offer a way to monetise videos by views, so the only way for talent to earn any money from the site was to be approached by companies that wanted to work with them, either to reach their audience or to promote their products.

At launch, nobody had expected Vine to be the next big thing – and he had not realised just how big it was himself until after he had woken up one morning after uploading a video to find that he had gained 50,000 new followers overnight.

Henry Bonsu asked where the control was in the relationship – he knew lots of people who had been successful over traditional platforms but who also complained that they felt that they were treated like commodities by their bosses; even Jamie Oliver had moved online because he had wanted more control over his output. He asked if online talent felt the same way.

‘Ashens’ said that, to an extent, the openness of online video sites meant anybody in the world could contact content producers directly. Consequently, this was a very personal medium of expression, and not one that was owned by a group or a committee. The talent acted as their own gatekeepers, but also as their own presenters, which made the output very intimate.

Henry Bonsu asked how many ancillary skills online content creators had to acquire. He knew many people that were brilliant performers – who could do television, film, radio or stand-up – but who couldn’t count a bean.

‘Ashens’ explained that he was also about twice the age of the average YouTuber, and he felt that this life experience had given him a bit more awareness of the importance of things like this. However, he imagined that somebody coming straight out of college might need a bit more guidance when looking after the numbers.



Daz Black agreed that online content creators had a lot of direct control over their output, and there were far fewer barriers between talent and their audience; they were also in direct contact with their fans all of the time – such as through the comments sections, or via Twitter. Ultimately, it was entirely up to the content creator what they wanted to put out to their audience.

Henry Bonsu observed that a number of new platforms had entered the market in competition with YouTube. He asked Daz and Ashens if they had ever looked into any of these, and whether they would ever considered moving to a competitor platform if they were offered a better deal.

‘Ashens’ said that one new entrant, Vessel, was quite interesting, because it took a different route of taking content and giving viewers an option to pay a subscription for early access; however, he had not really seen any alternatives to YouTube that provided any real monetisation or audience numbers as yet, so no.

Daz Black said that successfully attracting viewers could be very platform specific, and he knew a lot of British content creators who had struggled to attract attention on Vine, but who had achieved considerable success when they had moved to releasing content on Facebook.

From a monetising standpoint, YouTube was the only platform that really offered a financial return in this way, although Facebook, Vine and Twitter were currently talking about introducing various things. However, he predicted that these platforms

had seen the success that YouTube had achieved and would seek to develop new models to try to capitalise on the opportunities in the same way.

Henry Bonsu had noticed that Ashens had made a feature film, *Ashens and the Quest for the GameChild*, and asked if his audiences had migrated from online content to conventional platforms?

'Ashens' said that often quite a lot of scorn was directed towards actors who sought to move into new fields; however, he felt that this could be done, as long as enough work was done to prepare the audience and lead them in to the new field, and also assuming that the end product was good enough.

With regards to his film, he had previously made a large variety of content online, including scripted content, so this had not been an entirely alien leap for his followers. Also, his film had been partially crowd funded, which had been a good way to gain support for the project as it had built an audience who were involved in the project and who had an interest in making the film a success.

Henry Bonsu asked Daz if he would be interested in talking to the old dinosaur medium of television, or was he happy to do his own thing.



Daz Black said that he would be interested in working in television, although he was aware that there were a number of YouTube and Viners who would be quite happy to stick with their online activities.

One particularly interesting tendency of the online video scene was that prominent YouTubers would sometimes follow channels, which would often be a route for their followers to discover new content. There was a lot of fan loyalty.

Henry Bonsu asked Daz and Ashens if they were ever mobbed as he walked down Oxford Street.

Daz Black said that he was recognised quite a lot, which was something that often surprised him.

'Ashens' said that he was also recognised sometimes.

Henry Bonsu thanked Daz and Ashens.

Edward East, Claire Tavernier and Rich Keith all worked in the field of tracking views and monetising content. He asked Edward East how he had got into the field and how he saw the terrain.

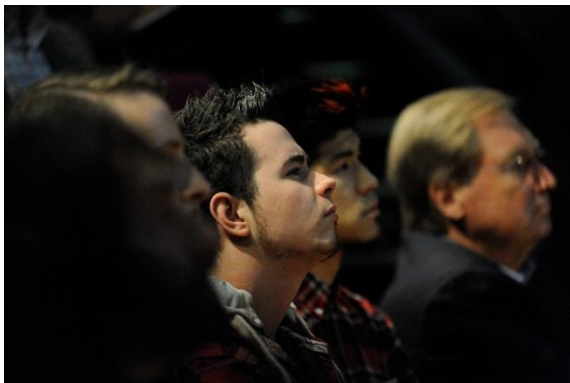
Edward East explained that Billion Dollar Boy had launched in 2014 and their main goal was to connect influencers, such as Daz or Ashens, with brands. They produced campaigns in which they introduced their influencers to such clients as Ford, McDonalds or the Discovery Network, and negotiated content deals for them.

Henry Bonsu asked Edward how such deals worked. Did he act in the same way a conventional agent?

Edward East explained that it a similar sort of arrangement. He had a good knowledge of the talent that he managed, and would approach brands on their behalf to see if they could pitch for work. For example, he had pitched on a big campaign for a major credit card company, where his talent would create Vines of people using their cards whilst on holiday.

If a pitch was accepted then he and the client would sit together and work out a story board in the traditional format.

Henry Bonsu asked how heavily involved the client would be in designing the campaign.



Edward East said that this would depend upon the client. Typically the client would provide a creative brief and then he would then design something and pitch it for their approval, although sometimes he would be asked to write the brief himself.

He was currently working with Lionsgate on a film called *Absolutely Anything*, which Daz and two of his colleagues, Huw Samuel and Leslie Wai, would be creating

Vines for. These would be based around the theme of what people would do if they had the power to do absolutely anything.

Henry Bonsu thanked Edward East. He introduced Rich Keith and asked him to explain the background and activities behind *The Yogscast*.

Rich Keith described how, many years ago, two guys who had liked playing video games with one another had decided to start a podcast where they talked about gaming. After YouTube had launched, they had formed a channel, which had quickly become one of the biggest channels in the UK and the first to achieve a billion views. The founders had also quickly found a large number of other gamers who they had started playing against and had decided to create a collective network of interconnected channels. They now had about 20 channels, 25m viewers a month, and over 23m subscribers.

Most of their content was based around video games, although they also made other content, including animation and music. However, their main content was videos of people playing video games while talking to each other. He provided a short sizzle reel that highlighted their content.

Henry Bonsu asked about the talent and how *The Yogscast* had developed.

Rich Keith explained that the driving motivation had been the desire to allow content creators to own their content. Consequently, the channel was 100% owned

by content creators, around which a company had been created which managed all of the back-room elements on their behalf, including editors, producers, an upload support team, an analytical team, commercialisation, finance, legal and any other relevant services. By providing this support, their members were able to focus solely upon content creation.

Henry Bonsu observed that 40% of YouTube visits were gaming related. He asked if *The Yogscast* provided a big enough platform for their stars, or might they seek to move on to other areas in the future.

Rich Keith felt that we were currently reaching the end of the first phase of YouTube. There were now several other platforms and significantly more content creators entering the market, which were driving down the amount of revenue per view of each YouTube video. He had originally been hired by *The Yogscast* to identify ways to reduce the potential risk to their business model by developing other income streams. It was fundamentally important to create a strong brand identity, cultivate talent and then go to other places.



Henry Bonsu had just come back from South Korea, where ESports, a form of professional video gaming, was a massive cultural phenomenon. He asked if *The Yogscast* would end up filling football stadiums.

Rich Keith described how *The Yogscast* already ran live events, where thousands of people turned up to meet their people; they had also run live shows as part of *The Gadget Show*. However, there was a big difference between what they did and the ESports scene; the best analogy was that, if professional ESports was like *Formula 1*, then *The Yogscast* was closer to *Top Gear*, namely people watching interested amateurs having fun.

Henry Bonsu asked how much of a fanbase *The Yogscast* had.

Rich Keith said that *The Yogscast* was an entertainment platform and had a large number of viewers. One of the strengths of YouTube was that it offered an amazing and very intimate method of connecting with an audience, and one of the reasons why content creators sometimes got mobbed in the street was that viewers really felt that they had a relationship with them. This was a level of intimacy that had not been seen on any other platform.

Henry Bonsu asked Claire Tavernier to talk about her career. Before StoryTechLife, she had worked in TV production, and then run ChannelFlip, so she had experience of both sides of the generational divide. He asked her where she thought that these developments were leading.

Claire Tavernier observed, that the content creators on the panel were very modest. Building a successful career as a YouTube or Vine star was quite hard work.

In order to make a video these content creators were coming up with their own ideas, scripting these, filming their content, doing their own hair and makeup, finding and making their own props, uploading it, marketing it through social media and finally managing all of the comments and fan interactions through social media. This was an incredibly laborious and demanding process that required a lot of talent.

However, her experience was that transitioning from this level of independence was a barrier upon online video talent moving into traditional content mediums.

Henry Bonsu asked if this was necessarily a bad thing. As Daz Black had said, he earned a living, so was there really a need to try to move into conventional media.



Claire Tavernier said that some online talent did and some did not. Vine clips were limited to six seconds, so there were obviously limits to what people could do in this time and, of course, TV obviously offered a different scale, access to different audiences, bigger budgets and a number of other benefits. Her experience was that it was easier for online content creators to transition to more individualised areas, such as books or radio, than to TV, because the level of creative independence was more comparable.

Henry Bonsu asked Claire if she had ever experienced a degree of snobbishness from people in old media towards new media content stars.

Claire Tavernier did not really feel that this was snobbishness; rather a misunderstanding, derived from a lack of knowledge.

Henry Bonsu noted that one of the themes over the day so far had been the lack of diversity across the audiovisual sector. He asked the panel if the online world was more elastic, democratic or honest about talent than traditional media had been.

Claire Tavernier said that the YouTube VLogger community in the UK was incredibly white and middle class. This was because people with the time and means to devote to making online videos generally came from a pretty specific background, which was not as diverse as one might hope. However, she did not feel that this was an intrinsically male pursuit.

Edward East disagreed with Claire Tavernier. YouTube was a very diverse platform, and he could name five people from diverse backgrounds that had built successful online careers, including Jenny Jenkins, a black make-up artist who worked with brands like TopShop, ASOS and Zara and who had over 780,000 fans, and a Muslim fashion blogger, with over 670,000 fans, who specialised in hijab tutorials. The online space offered the potential for a considerable breadth of diverse talent to find an audience, although this was not always recognised by either the mainstream media or by anybody that was not specifically looking for it.

Claire Tavernier agreed that online content had a very long tail and a potential for talent catering for niche interests to find an audience. Nevertheless, if one were to look at the 40 most popular channels in the UK for VLoggers, then there was not a lot of diversity.

Henry Bonsu noted that Jamal Edwards's channel *SBTV*, had gained a lot of attention; however, he was the only BAME content creator in this space that most people could name.

Daz Black said that all that people needed to be successful in this space was an engaging personality, great content ideas and a camera.

Henry Bonsu asked Daz and Stuart if they had an idea in their mind of their viewer or target audience were when they were creating content.

'**Ashens**' did not approach things in this way. His videos were very product led, literally: he would take a product and then take the mickey out of it. The only thing in his mind was whether the content was entertaining, and whoever wanted to watch it could.

Daz Black had a similar process. He never really thought about who his followers were, he was just very glad to have them; he viewed them all as individuals rather than seeking to categorise in this way.

However, there was a huge range of diversity amongst successful Viners. For example, the most successful Viners in the world included King Batch, who was African American.

Henry Bonsu returned to the question of money, and how advertising revenues were split between people. He asked Edward how the split worked between his company, the platform and the talent.

Edward East said that Billion Dollar Boy operated within two different areas. One part of his business helped to influence their work with brands, including organising deals, taking a project management fee and paying their influencers for their work. The other side of his business was a focus on helping film and TV companies to monetise their rights on YouTube; in this case, they would look for third party uploads of copyrighted content and ensure that the advertising revenues went back to the rights owner.

He explained this with the illustration of some recent work that he had done with Mel Gibson's production company, Icon, who had made *The Passion of the Christ*. If you were to search YouTube for *The Passion of the Christ*, you could typically find about 30,000 unauthorised clips taken from the movie – particularly, around this time of year, from people who wanted to celebrate Easter. He would identify these and allow the uploaders to keep these clips up, but would also work with YouTube to sell advertising around these clips. The split for this sort of work would typically be that



Mel Gibson would get \$70 of every \$100 earned, and Billion Dollar Boy would keep the other \$30.

Henry Bonsu had been thinking less about the Mel Gibson's of this world than Daz and Ashens who, while successful, still had some way to go before they started hanging out in Beverley Hills.

Edward East said that this was very much on a case by case basis, although he might make pitches for work around the six figure level. However, this was still a developing space, and the real change had been that, where he would once have been chasing work, he was now starting to get inbound opportunities.

Rich Keith said that *The Yogscast* made some deals along these sorts of lines. However, he always considered that the model of monetisation through brand endorsement had the potential to be badly received by fans, who could be quite vocal if they thought someone had sold out. Another concern was that the regulations around product placement were quite strict, and were not always understood or followed, and he was concerned that this might undermine the long term viability of the model.

He was more interested in the potential for content creators to build big audiences online and then transition into books, TV and movies, rather than simply being a front man for an ever increasing collection of brands.



Claire Tavernier said that the brand endorsement space on YouTube had been a learning curve and, while brands found this to be a useful way to connect with audiences that were not really watching TV, when she had worked at ChannelFlip she had always been clear that the brands that she had worked with did not adversely impact upon the creative element of the work, and that also that the talent were not making pure product endorsements. For example, she had worked with Dr Pepper to create a tongue

in cheek and quite funny campaign, which had also been popular with fans.

She felt that backlashes developed when videos did not clearly signpost their brand relationships. However, she was reassured by the amounts of self-regulation in the industry and felt that things were continuing to evolve in the right direction.

Henry Bonsu asked how much money ChannelFlip gave to its stars.

Claire Tavernier said that this depended on the extent to which brands wanted to work with them. This was, in part, due to how big the audience was and how creative the output was. However, people with particularly dedicated or niche followings might command a much higher fee, because their audience was so targeted. There was no magic formula and the market was very much based on an offer and demand type relationship.

Henry Bonsu thanked the panel and invited questions from the audience.

Dishad Husain, Imotion Films explained that he ran a corporate video company for education and technology, so did a lot of work with YouTube. He observed that YouTube could gain immediate feedback, which could sometimes be quite vicious. He asked Daz and Ashens how they dealt with hate mail, and also how they managed to keep in contact with and build personal relationships with all of their fans.

‘Ashens’ followed the golden rule, NRTC: Never Read The Comments. After a bit, YouTube chains tended to descend into weird and incomprehensible exchanges that only bore a passing resemblance to interpretable English. Long conversations developed that were chains of in-references to previous posts, and where commentators traded vicious attacks with one another – and occasionally said something horrible about the video – rather than attempting to say anything constructive.

Unfortunately, it was human nature to skim over the thousands of positive remarks and fixate on the one person who was being negative. After a certain point, you had to distance yourself from reading the comments, and it became impossible to get through them all, because there were just so many.

He engaged with his fans through other methods than YouTube comments. He found Twitter to be particularly good, although people did not always like it; also, email was very effective. He had found that if people took the time to go through at least three steps before hitting send then they were likely to have something worthwhile to say.

Daz Black loved receiving good comments from fans, but these could sometime get lost in hatred and self-advertising gibberish. He always tried to take the time to find the one or two comments that were actually saying something relevant and nice about the content, and to send a personal response, because these were the people that he most wanted to build a relationship with. However, the best way to deal with trolls was to ignore them.

He was not always able to go through every response on every platform, but did dedicate time every day to responding to people in the comments section. Connecting with his fans really meant a lot to him.

Kimberley Ferguson, GFM Films asked how the number of hits was calculated, and how reliable these figures were.

‘Ashens’ said that YouTube themselves provided statistics of how many times any individual piece of content was viewed.

Daz Black said that these figures, unlike other media statistics, were easily available and were very clear to see on every video.

Andy Taylor, BBC Radio 1 was responsible for looking after movies and gaming content for Radio 1. Rich Keith had predicted that we were coming to the end of the first phase of YouTube; he asked the panel to predict what the next phase would look like.

Claire Tavernier said that, when The Beatles and The Rolling Stones had become big, there had been a tendency for everybody to compare everything against them. It had taken a while for new genres of music to emerge that differentiated themselves against one another.

Similarly, in this new space, some of the big stars that had been around from the beginning would disappear and others would stay around for another ten years. However, she was not seeing a new wave of massive stars appearing; instead, there was a sort of clustering around specific interests, which she thought was an exciting development and absolutely the right way to go.

Henry Bonsu asked what the career prospects would be.

Claire Tavernier thought that online content creators were developing a skillset that was very transferable to other platforms and other forms of media.

Henry Bonsu asked Edward what the future held.

Edward East said that Billion Dollar Boy had only launched last year, and had made 20-30 deals; this year, over the last three months alone, he had made over 120 – so there was clearly a lot of growth still to come. As Ben Keen had noted earlier, advertising spend was shifting to online – from £24 billion in 2010 to £49 billion in 2014, so this was clearly a space full of opportunity.

Rich Keith felt that the sort of things that people were worried about now would usher in the next phase: the explosion in interest and the amount of content being produced, meant that there had been a huge increase in the number of subscriptions to YouTube channels, but that each individual subscription was becoming less meaningful. Consequently, he predicted that new models for judging the influence of content creators would develop.

He also predicted that alternative platforms to YouTube would mature, and that creators would increasingly distribute their work across a range of different platforms.

Oliver Diamond, Bob & Co. had been producing work on the changing patterns of demand for studio space in the UK: currently, money was moving from film to TV production, but the advertising spend was now shifting to online platforms. He asked if this would lead to a market for high-end and high-budget short form content developing, or would this sector continue to be founded upon people developing content themselves on their smartphones.

‘Ashens’ said that, when you considered online video in general this had already occurred – Netflix and other OTT services were already commissioning and producing high-end content.

With regards to YouTube, while more money was being spent on YouTube advertising, the CPM was currently dropping. He predicted that YouTube would increasingly move towards making higher end content, and the money would increasingly go to the top 1%, or maybe the top 5%, of channels. As more money for

production came in, he predicted that there would be a big change in the kinds of content that were produced.

Claire Tavernier said that some very exciting content was currently being made for YouTube, and that the Vlogging format was now being adapted and replicated. Also, technological development meant that it was now possible for people to make some very exciting and innovative techniques without needing a studio – albeit using things like Cannon cameras rather than smartphones.



While the Netflix's and Amazon's of this world were spending millions on TV-equivalent large scale productions, YouTube seemed to be evolving in a different direction.

Srinivas Madala, StreamHub. asked Daz and Ashens how much of a role audience information played into their creativity. Was there a tendency to get into the flow of trying to impress their followers, and how easy or difficult was it for them to keep their own sense of originality.

'Ashens' said that he was not really influenced by this at all. His work was very much dictated by what he had around him and, if he were to, say, decide to slip some knowledge about Luxembourg into his next video because a lot of people from Luxembourg had viewed his previous one, then this would just dilute his output and seem weird.

Also, if a particular demographic or interest group were to start following him then this would be because they liked what he was currently doing, and the best way to retain their interest would be to keep doing it.

Daz Black received so many comments and such a wide range of feedback that it was impossible to produce content in response to this. However, from navigating feedback he could get a sense of what sort of things were working and what was not by trial and error.

Mr Bonsu thanked all of the speakers and brought the session to an end.

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