Q Cinema: Monetising Research-led Public Engagement at the Showroom Cinema

The project brief

Q Cinema is a collaborative project between the Showroom Cinema and the Humanities Research Institute (HRI), which combined technology and high quality academic research in order to generate additional economic value from the cinema’s existing content and programming.

“The project presented a ‘QR code’ in the promotional literature for one of the Showroom Cinema’s film festivals, inviting cinema goers to photograph/scan the icon using their mobile phone in order to have additional content streamed to their mobile or desktop PC in return for a micropayment.

The project was undertaken by early career researchers (ECRs) from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences. It was a, ‘hands on’, training in enterprise, immersing ECRs in a project which has economic impact as its core objective, involves a commercial stakeholder and which requires them to manage and deliver work within a genuinely collaborative and interdisciplinary environment.

Outcomes observed

The project sought to develop and evaluate the following skills in the three involved ECRs:

- Client relationship management with non-academic stakeholders
- Interdisciplinary team-based working to solve problems
- All aspects of project management (establishing and managing objectives, tasks, resources, workflows, deliverables and risk)
- Adapting research specialism and research methodologies for non-academic environments
- Thinking about one’s research within the context of innovation (e.g. commercial R&D)
- Establishing and testing market opportunities for new products and services which are designed around their research (i.e. how does one go about doing this?)

There was a highly varied level of success and confidence in the ECRs involved regarding maximising these skill development opportunities. One ECR demonstrated a good teamwork ability, planning and delivering work to fit in with the work of others, particularly as the timetable became increasingly pressured. This organisational ability was not as prevalent in other team members. One ECR developed an excellent relationship with the client and their customers whilst other team members seemed unable to engage with anything outside the subject area of their PhDs. The same ECR went to great lengths exploring how best to present his knowledge for a non-academic audience, settling on ‘talking heads’ videos as the
most effective medium. The ability to adapt their research specialism and methodologies to a non-academic environment proved challenging to some team members.

**Key impacts and challenges**

A key aspect of this project was engagement with the client, the Showroom Cinema and their customers. It became apparent that some team members did not have the ability to project manage or confidence in engaging with our partners.

Given that many professions (whether they are in academia or retail) use a project management model for developing and delivering their core business, the issues which our project uncovered are not trivial. If this realisation is the project’s only impact upon the individuals in question, then at least we will have achieved something.

For the project leader, the key impact has been the opportunity to explore some very innovative ideas with the client and to identify colleagues who would be serious about taking these ideas forward.

**The legacy**

The project will serve as a good prototype and underpin a large funding application to the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). We still have the survey data, so we will undertake an analysis of this ourselves, which will in turn reinforce the AHRC application.

The prototype will be sustained by the HRI in line with all of its deliverables and we hope to develop it further in the future in collaboration with the client.

The model of throwing researchers into a non-academic project environment and asking them to manage a deliverable on behalf of an external client is something which is being taken forward in the Faculty’s Digital Humanities MA modules – a key aim of this is to improve research innovation and employability by developing project management skills within the context of academic research. However, the experience of QCinema has highlighted the need to include project management training as part of the modules (preparing a project plan as part of an assessed piece of work and work collaboratively to deliver a project for a third-party).

**Enterprise & Innovation**

One ECR developed a fully-worked example of how he saw his research expertise being discoverable to a non-academic audience, so it was clear that he could respond to the brief both independently and collaboratively from the outset.

The project team demonstrated that cinema-goers are interested in being able to access academic content to reinforce their cinema experience and that they are prepared to pay a small fee for this content, making the purchase via a mobile device.

**To find out more contact**

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