

6. HOW TO MAKE ENHANCED TV

The BBC's Interactive Factual and Learning (iF&L) department has been operating for 18 months, and is one of the only production houses in the UK making true enhanced programming. Although new challenges are always presenting themselves, iF&L have quite a few runs on the board and can speak from experience about what works for them.

Below is a description of their current process of putting together an enhanced TV program, along with a list of issues to think about along the way:

STEP 1. THE iTV PROPOSAL

The Interactive proposal is written to outline how interactivity will enhance the linear program. So you need to ask yourself:

What is the Linear Program?

A strong linear program is the key to any interactive application. People will only want to interact if the program compels them to. Interactivity cannot save a poor program. Further, the linear program you are enhancing must be able to stand-alone because for the foreseeable future, a percentage of the audience will not be able to interact with it.

What is the Enhancement and why?

Why is there an enhancement to the TV show? Is it a good enough reason? If it is just a bolt on idea then it is a waste of time. The interactivity must be an inherent part of the show and enhance the experience for those who choose to interact with it. Otherwise, don't bother.

In answering these questions you should also think about:

- a) How the viewers watch the program. Do they yell answers at the TV?
- b) What's the objective of the application? Is it to increase ratings, audience retention or revenue?

What media platforms will the audience participate through?

How will you deliver the interactivity? Will there be SMS? A website? Can people telephone in or email? Is there a live audience element? Do enough people have digital interactive TV?

Who is your audience? Who are you aiming at and why? Are they watching on pay TV or free to air? What are their lifestyle habits?

It's a good idea to be as inclusive as possible for slow technology adopters.

What is the Content for Each Platform?

What content (if any) will you offer on Web, Mobile, and TV? This will be decided in a series of editorial meetings. You must offer fresh content on different platforms to give people a reason to go there.

Do you use an existing format or build a new application?

Over time, a number of applications can be re-used for other shows. For example, The Chelsea Flower Show uses the same format as Wimbledon. Or perhaps you

need to make more time for a purpose-built format. Plan forward for advances in technology if the show will go to air in more than a year's time.

What are the technical considerations?

Is the proposal restricted by the technical limitations of the broadcaster? Digital Terrestrial, Dcable, Dsatellite? Consider the availability of channels to multi stream at the scheduled time.

What are the delivery times and technical requirements for the audiovisual materials (including graphics and text) to play out from the interactive operations area. What are the technical requirements for the other media platforms – mobile, web, etc. Do you need any specific software to be written or acquired?

What Resources will we need?

How many teams, what expertise do we need to create and deliver content across all those platforms. This will be decided in the resource meetings.

In the BBC, the New Media department handle the contracting, building, testing and delivery of the applications needed to broadcast the interactive service.

What is the Budget?

How much does it cost to deliver your vision? What can you deliver for the money? What you hope to do and what you can afford to do are factors that will battle each other as the budget evolves. Obviously a text or vote application is much cheaper than a full multi streaming application.

Marketing - plan the cross platform marketing messages!

The biggest obstacle iTV producers face in getting people to use the service is in telling them what it does. Marketing the interactive service is vital, and the TV show has to push audiences to interact and move between media platforms.

As interactivity is an instant gratification, the promos which prompt people to press the red button now get the biggest responses.

Tell the audience what they will get out of the interactive experience – what's the payoff? If they don't know why they should take part, then they won't.

Finalise the iTV Proposal

All the above information will be included in the iTV proposal, which is the pitch document for the application.

STEP 2. PRE-PRODUCTION

If the iTV proposal is commissioned along with the linear program, pre-production commences on both the linear program and the enhanced content.

Plan the teams and how they will work together

Ideally the production team for the linear program will be the same as that for the enhanced content. At present this is rarely the case.

Sharing researchers, content, sets and locations is ideal.

Schedule and Budget

The broadcast channel, the linear production team, the iTV team, the technical teams, marketing will all have inputs to the schedule and budget. They will be evolving documents!

Negotiate the rights

Its not just TV rights you have to consider now. Make sure you secure all ancillary rights to disseminate the content across the various platforms. eg online, mobile etc. as well as for multiple looping.

Also secure the ongoing rights for the Interactive TV software applications which will drive the functionality of your show.

Design & testing of your concept

Usability and Design are key considerations for your iTV application. Its functionality impacts on how it will look and how appealing it is to use. User testing can be as simple as a paper storyboard or a power point shown to colleagues, or as complex as a full prototype tested using consultants and test groups. The type of testing you can afford to do will be dictated by your schedule and budget. But make sure you allow time to make the necessary changes arising from testing.

The Software is needed earlier than you think!

A single bug in the application could crash every Set top Box in the country so Sky TV likes to have the 8 weeks to test the software applications. So its prudent to ensure the Software application is completed 3 ½ months before Transmission.

STEP 3. PRODUCTION

Allocated teams create the following content:

- Audio Visual content for linear program and for enhanced content.
- Software applications for iTV
- Graphics and text for iTV
- Mobile content
- Web content
- Marketing promos for all platforms

You should co-ordinate the shooting schedules for enhanced content or promos with the linear schedule to avoid doubling up on sets, actors, props etc.

STEP 4. POST PRODUCTION /TESTING

Then assemble all these elements in a rough cut or demo model, which is tested and refined until you are ready to compile the 'online version'.

Further testing

Do you do further testing at this stage? You may choose to do audience tests with demo model of the program. If so, allow time for re-edits and re-shoots to fix obvious problems.

STEP 5. DELIVERY/TECH REVIEW

The deliverables are handed over to the broadcasting technicians to check that they meet all the requirements for each broadcast platform (cable, sat, terrestrial)

There will be over air testing of the application through a trial channel from the multi streaming area (MSA). Applications are usually tested using set top box 'farms' to ensure the service is working on all platforms.

This is often tested, tweaked, and then tested again.

You might choose to implement user testing at this stage as well (but only do so if you have planned to reflect this in the production schedule)

Similarly, other content is technically tested over other media platforms of web, mobile etc.

STEP 6. TRANSMISSION and MONITORING

Correct transmission should be monitored by a presentation control room who can notify appropriate people of any problems.

Decide what is the most reasonable level of monitoring of playout. In practice it may end up being team members who monitor it from home.

STEP 7. RATINGS AND FEEDBACK

Ratings

The interactive ratings process in the UK differs slightly from the linear ratings system.

It is usually measured in terms of the 'percentage of available audience'. This means the percentage of all the Digital TV homes watching your program that chose to interact. For 2003/2004, the target figure for the BBC is 30%.

BARB in the UK can provide figures for Dsat only. And can measure the percentage of available audience, as well as how many stayed with the service (retention). It can also provide figures on the demographic of those using the service.

Digital cable can measure page impressions much like the Internet.

The consensus is that current ratings methods are not satisfactory. They do not distinguish between a 2-week interactive application and one that lasts for 20 minutes. So it does not compare like with like. Only Dsat is being measured to a satisfactory degree. Freeview does not get measured yet. Effective measurement is the only way to convince advertisers of the audience pulling power of applications.

Feedback

It is prudent to set up a system of feedback from an audience about the iTV service and to monitor this regularly. Remember, the viewer is king.

Post-match analysis

It is also beneficial to hold an debrief session for all those involved in bringing the enhanced program to air, to share learning from the processes strengths and weaknesses for next time.

STEP 8. ARCHIVING

At present, it's not possible to instantly capture the entire interactive experience as it plays out. But this will soon change with the development of PVR technology to capture the entire experience at playout onto a hard drive, to be replicated at any time.

At the moment, the separate components of video streams, software applications and other content, such as graphics and text are captured separately, in the traditional forms of storing those media.

Approximations of iTV services can be captured on:

- Video – recorded 'walk-throughs' of the interactive service can easily be captured.
- DVD's - may be commissioned after the application to replicate the full interactive service (one of these is available from the AFTRS library for Pyramids).

MORE ON THE PRODUCTION TEAM

I asked John Kent and Marc Goodchild of the BBC Interactive Factual & Learning (iF&L) team what some typical headaches in iTV production were.

Marc Goodchild:

"Well, graphics need to be created up front. You cannot wait for post production as these graphics are needed for on screen navigation.

"Also, producing becomes complex matrix management - you are dealing with software engineers as well. And the culture clash between these two industries needs to be managed. TV works to a set schedule and must deliver for a set broadcast date. Traditionally, most software launches 'when it is ready'. In TV, priorities are continually shifting, and this makes it difficult for the software engineers who are not used to working to a deadline.

"Language is also a problem. Often there are no names to describe what you want to do, so you have to continually make mock-ups so people 'get it'. Production Values is another issue. The main feature program may have a huge budget of 2 million, but we are challenged to create 2 other streams of content on 1/10th the budget, with compatible production values".

John Kent:

"At the moment, there is a Factual and Learning department at the BBC (which makes the linear programs), and there is Interactive Factual and Learning, which sits outside the linear production cycle. So with 'Beasts', it had been in planning for a long time before our interactive team were brought on. It's Marcs aim to catch up to the point where they are involved from the very beginning."

Ideally John says there should not be a separate department for iTV but they should be integrated. According to Kent, the ideal structure for a 6 part interactive series would be as follows:

PRODUCTION TEAM:
(6 part interactive series)

