Canadian Content in a Digital World

Topline Summary Edmonton

November 7th 2016

Event Details

This is a flash summary of key themes and discussions emerging from the Canadian Content in a Digital World Roundtable session held in Edmonton on November 7th, 2016 at the Winspear Centre.

The session consisted of a half-day discussion in which participants were invited to provide their views and perspectives on three broad questions related to the ongoing Canadian Content in a Digital World consultation namely:

- o What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?

- o How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?

- o How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in the digital world, and how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?

- During the session each question was given an equal allotment of time. Given the overlapping focus of these questions and the organic nature of the conversation, many of the themes coming out of the discussion is applicable to different subject areas within each question. In order to avoid repetition, this topline summary has been organised to best represent the themes discussed.

- The session was facilitated by Marc Beaudoin and each at table discussion was led by an Ipsos facilitator.

- A total of **56** individuals participated in the discussion. All roundtable participants were identified by PCH and recruiting was a combined effort between the department and Ipsos.

- The Minister of Canadian Heritage as well as PCH Policy representatives were on hand to listen to feedback first-hand and provide additional context as needed.

Key Takeaways

- Success is different in an artistic focused system than in a commercial focused system, and finding the right balance between these two viewpoints is important to ensuring a thriving industry.
- There was no consensus between participants on the definition of Canadian content. Many felt that a better definition for who qualifies as a *Canadian creator* and what constitutes *Canadian content* is needed to allow for them to be truly protected and supported. Perhaps the time has come to broaden our perspective beyond accepted traditional definitions to include technological creators and digital entrepreneurs.
- Innovation and risk-taking are key drivers to fostering continued and expanded cultural content creation. Likewise, promoting private investment in the cultural sector and facilitating the entrepreneurial spirit are key determinants to creators' continued success.
- Government can and should play a role in supporting emerging creators seeking to develop their skills to build a self-sustaining business. In so doing, it will encourage participation in this segment of the economy. Funding mechanisms currently in place need to be revisited to fit with existing and future directions of the digital cultural space, through streamlining the processes and opening up some of the restrictions by medium.
- A diversity of voices to include different regions, visible and linguistic minorities, women, the LGBTQ community and diverse perspectives remains an important consideration when supporting and promoting a broad and inclusive cultural industry.
- Support through the development of business and technological skills among creators go hand in hand with ensuring the long term success of Canada's cultural industry, this could be through training programs and funding support for further education.
- Mentorship and co-productions are opportunities for creative development and innovation, however a balance must be struck in terms of funding support for international co-productions to ensure economic benefits remain in Canada.
- Maintaining IP in Canada is essential to fair remuneration for creators and for ensuring Canadian control of creative development.

Detailed discussion

Overall, participants were very encouraged that the Department of Canadian Heritage was hosting these discussion sessions across the country, and many suggested a continuous open dialogue going forward to assist the industry in keeping pace.

What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?

As participants disagreed on what constitutes Canadian content and what constitutes a creator, needs to be better defined. Opinions of what should be included in "Canadian" content varied greatly across discussions. Similarly, there was some discussion that technological creators and digital entrepreneurs need to be included in the class of creators.

Supporting Creators

Most agreed that supporting creators requires better access to funding.

- There was significant discussion of changing the funding model in the cultural sector from a subsidy based approach to the development of an independent financially viable market. Common suggestions for achieving this included:
    - Make the criteria for awarding funding more flexible – there was a prevailing view that current criteria are too narrow in scope, forcing creators to develop content that meets prescribed criteria to gain access to funding. This is seen and limiting the creative potential of the sector with too much focus on a financially successful end product rather than striking a balance between profitability and creativity. This flexibility also extends to funding mechanisms that allow and support cross-pollination between the different cultural industries.
    - Streamline the process to make it easier for creators to navigate, such as rolling deadlines for funding throughout the year to open up more possibilities for funding.
    - Some felt focusing on funding creators rather than producers and distributors was important, others felt that broadening the scope of funding models to allow entrepreneurs to access funds was also important.
    - Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among creators and investors to take risk by promoting the societal responsibility for private sector investment.
        - Allow for private start-up investment similar to start-up and natural resource investment seen in the province.
        - Tax incentives for private investors and start-up enterprises, where perhaps creative businesses and/or their investors are given a tax break until they are making a profit.
    - Decentralize funding to provide more regional equity across the country, enabling better access to creators that work outside major urban centers and allow access for more local and regional creators. There was a feeling that while the province contributes to the sector, federal funding is less active in Alberta.
    - Review other funding models internationally and across industries for best practices.
- Others felt that perhaps casting a wider net and allowing for more risk-taking as opposed to proven financially viable content would better benefit the Canadian cultural sector. This would lead to further developing Canadian creators' experience, a greater diversity of voices and more freedom for creative expression beyond proven financially motivated productions.
- Many felt that we need to keep funding in the hands of Canadian creators, to drive reinvestment and greater local economic benefits from the Canadian cultural sector.

In addition to funding, there was significant discussion of investing in the development of creators.

- Several suggestions of how governments could support the development of a sustainable and financially independent cultural workforce in Canada were made. Key recommendations included:
    - Encouraging young people to pursue a career in arts and culture and fostering the development of a sustainable career path for the sector.
    - Supporting the development of digital skills through all facets of culture through a foundational training program, as there was mention of limited pathways for further training in western Canada.

- o Supporting maintaining Canadian IP in Canada and in the hands of creators.
- o Allowing creators the time and resources to explore their art or creation, to develop a final product or piece that explores their idea and expresses their story. This is true of film, music, literature, visual arts, and even app and game development. Creators need to be given time to explore their chosen craft, to make attempts and improve. Some felt financial support during this exploration was important, they still need to be able to make a living while they develop these skills.
- o Allowing for mentorship or co-creation projects where creators can learn from each other and develop an experience sharing program within a medium but also across disciplines.
- o Supporting networking and connection building within the sector through participation in conferences and support for attendance at international events.
- o Offer training in business and entrepreneurship to creators so that they can become financially independent and sustainable.

Ensuring that the return on Canada's investment in cultural content benefits Canadian creators was seen as essential to long term success.

- Ownership of intellectual property was seen as a concern given the influence funding support and producers can have on the outcome of how a story is told. The distribution needs to be kept in Canadian hands so the sustainable revenue stays at home and can be reinvested in Canadian content.
- Many expressed that regulation around IP and copyright need to be revisited, in order to ensure that the artists/creators can own their own IP and keep it in Canada.
    - o They suggested that, in many industries, those who are seen as successful Canadian creative exporters are viewed as having American backers. This benefits the Canadian brand but there is growing concern that the revenue and benefits are not flowing back to Canada nor to Canadian creators.
    - o Contributors to the IP should benefit from revenues, creators such as actors, musicians and writers should be compensated according to financial success of the project.

There was general agreement that fostering a culture of valuing Canadian content through raising awareness and educating Canadians is key to supporting Canadian creators.

- A culture of valuing Canadian stories and story-tellers was a primary goal or desire of many of the participants. Citizens should be encouraged to seek out Canadian content and stories.
- Culture needs to be invested in from the ground up, Canadians need to be digitally literate and engaged in Canadian culture, promoting a culture that values culture.
- One idea was reiterated throughout the discussion by many participants, that a key value and strength of Canadian content is the diversity of voices, both as reflection of our diversity and a celebration of our differences. Some feel that this unique trait is under threat, that the cultural influences from Canada's closest neighbour, the United States, and a myriad of other media sources is challenging Canada's own cultural identity.
- One participant took this a step further and argued that Canada's voice is the world's voice, and that the global nature of the digital space as well as Canadian citizens needs to be taken into account in any cultural policy. Participants made a case for co-productions and support of collaborative creation across geographical boundaries to allow for cultural ties of Canadian communities to be further incorporated into the National discussion.
- Others stressed the role of Franco-Albertans within the national francophone culture is often forgotten. Support for francophone creators outside of Quebec was seen as vital for this community, including access to larger francophone markets outside of the province.

Many supported a cross-discipline approach, to review best practices within different industries across Canada and around the world to emulate within the digital space. The video game and music industries were often cited as having experience in this area that can be incorporated into a national framework.

Citizen Choice

In the context of digital content, choice is unlimited and inherent in universal access to the Internet. The key is how Canada leverages digital platforms to promote and distribute Canadian content.

- Some argued that Canada should develop its own Canadian digital platform to promote homegrown content in competition with existing platforms. Others argued that Canada's needs to develop a strategy to be more competitive on existing platforms (e.g. Netflix) and better utilize existing local platforms.
- Some felt that there needs to be more choices available for accessing content beyond the larger private companies that represent the majority of broadcasting in Canada.

Choice fatigue was discussed, the unlimited nature of what is available online and amount of content can make it difficult for citizens to make informed choices regarding content consumption.

- Discussion focused on the role of algorithms in filtering content presented to audiences as well as the validity of beginning with a net neutrality perspective. Many online content platforms focus on content and recommend content based on user preferences and usage patterns, limiting discoverability.
- Many felt that while platforms are good at delivering content that audiences know they want and need, it is more difficult to promote discovery of new content beyond this "safety" area of what is known. Discovery is an important part of the citizen experience in consuming cultural content. While the digital age is in some ways making access and finding different content easier, it is also making it easier to ignore content that might challenge viewers/citizens.
- Another option discussed was the role of cultural curators in promoting and suggesting new content, driving discovery. While some felt that this led to other potential bias over what is deemed quality content, others felt that having Canadian curators of content would benefit the overall promotion of Canadian culture and creativity.

Access to the internet and online sources was discussed as a limitation for some citizens in access.

- Many of the current approaches to digital content assumes universal access to the Internet, while rural areas and lower income citizens can have limited access.

How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in the digital world, and how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?

Building a strong brand for Canadian content at home was seen as a key measure for promoting Canada's creativity globally.

- For some, Canadian content is content created by Canadians, for others, the content must communicate a Canadian perspective.
- Some felt that investing in Canadian businesses and employers within the cultural sector was more important than investing in distinctively Canadian content.
- While some advocate for keeping current Canadian content regulations on mediums like TV and Radio, others felt that we should remove restrictions and potentially allow for more innovative and collaborative creations.
- Need to address the feeling that if a creator reaches success they leave Canada or need to leave Canada in order to achieve this success.

Most participants agreed that a diversity of voices and perspectives was the key to strengthening quality information and promoting democracy.

- There was general discussion concerning the media's lack of resources to cover Canadian and local content. Some argued that it is still important to share local and regional identities and information, suggesting that perhaps a funding mechanism for smaller outlets could be created.
- The public's decreasing trust in traditional sources was also discussed, stressing that journalism has become a revenue stream rather than a public duty to report factual news, this shift needs to be addressed.

How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?

Most participants agreed that Canada positioning itself as a global leader in cultural and digital content is essential to supporting a thriving cultural ecosystem at home, capable of benefiting the growth of the middle class. Promoting Canadian culture abroad will require bolstering its image at home and the development of a clear cultural export strategy that is aligned with Canada's industrial and innovation strategies. Canada needs to be a part of the global conversation on culture.

Creating a Thriving Cultural Ecosystem that Benefits the Growth of the Middle Class

Most agreed that a thriving cultural ecosystem that benefits the growth of the middle class requires that Canada position itself as a global leader in cultural and digital content.

- Many participants already see Canada as a cultural and digital content leader, while others saw the potential for Canada to expand in this area. Canada's competitive advantages were identified by participants as the diversity of our voices and ability to tailor ourselves to niche markets within the international community.
- Quality content is important in order to attract audiences, but taking risks on developing creators with less than stellar content still important. Some felt it essential to promote exceptional content that demonstrates the excellence of Canadian content, rather than broadly promoting Canada's creativity. Canada needs to be better at celebrating its best.
- Collaboration across sectors, regions, and mediums were all suggested. Crossing from digital to theatre, or bringing together many smaller entities to benefit creators and build teams for innovation was one suggestion for positioning Canada a leader on the world stage.
- Canada's cultural institutions were seen as one piece of the overall system. While many felt it important to strengthen these institutions and/or their Canadian content regulations, a few questioned the infrastructure in place to support creators in reaching them. Many felt the Broadcast Act needed to be revisited to include the digital space. Some felt that bringing together all of the different cultural institutions would defragment the space, while others argued for maintaining diversity of funding and support sources within the cultural space.

Reaching Beyond our Borders

- While many like the idea of promoting Canadian content, values and identity internationally, some felt that there is a stronger need to focus domestically before being concerned with international audiences. They felt that by capturing a Canadian audience with quality and building pride in Canadian content that global promotion would be much easier.
- Reaching beyond our borders however remains important for many, to promote Canadian values internationally. Some suggestions included:
  - Promoting of Canadian content through Canadian embassies and trade missions to create/renew trade routes for Canadian creators.
  - International showcases of Canadian content through themed trips and opportunities for international media and stakeholders to view Canadian content, similar to what is done for other sectors such as tourism.
  - Highlighting Canadian content where possible, similar to Air Canada's Canadian features.
- Many discussed how Canadian creators often go unnoticed here but are powerhouses internationally – more needs to be done domestically to celebrate our successes on the global stage. There was a perception that these creators often receive recognition in Canada only once they have received acclaim abroad.
- Many suggested putting Canadian content under a unique brand internationally, with some going further to encourage marketing Canadian content together rather than focusing on individual pieces.