

New Territory for Art

From the iPhone to the Brooklyn Museum

Introduction

The [iPhone](#) is a media enabled smart phone first released in 2007 by [Apple](#). One of the device's primary features, which has attracted widespread attention and strong popular culture status, is that of the 'app'. These interactive digital applications can be downloaded and purchased from the online [Apple store](#) and range in content from cheerful games to useful media and environmental tools (such as live weather reports and GPS navigation). The fact that apps can be created by a third party - not the developer Apple, but by consumers themselves - has opened up a myriad of potential for businesses who can engage customers with interactive advertising through creative practices. As well as directing people to bars and amusing them on the bus, the advent of the iPhone app has the potential to be exploited by the cultural sector as well as by businesses.

Brooklyn Museum

One of the primary cultural organisations to utilise this technology is the [Brooklyn Museum](#). The official Brooklyn Museum app can be downloaded from Apple, free of charge, and was developed by Adam Shackelford. Currently available is version 1.3, which essentially functions as a mobile collection of the museum's exhibits. It allows users to search for images by keyword, just browse, or simply view general information about the museum. This gives users free reign to access and play with the museum's collection as they wish.

The road to the latest version began with the construction of the Brooklyn Museum API (Applications Programming Interface), which in layman's terms means a way that outside programmers and technology-savvy consumers can create their own digital applications using the museum's collections data. For example, they could include them in their blog postings or reinvent them and thus create a new cultural item. The creation of the Brooklyn Museum app is part of a much larger API project, which could have huge implications on the way cultural organisations engage with their current and potential visitors. This is not just letting people see the exhibits or use the images in their own online postings, but to re-create and re-invent them to form new art from an old item.

It is worth noting that the Brooklyn Museum app is an open source community project, inviting collaboration from anyone who wishes to contribute. Also on the Brooklyn Museum website, a forum has been opened in the comments section to a post about the release of the app. Here, the museum's bloggers have interacted with users to help improve the app's functionality and features. Although the

first version received a degree of criticism, this has allowed subsequent versions to benefit from the feedback. This constructs a dialogue of collaboration on several levels.

Co-creation

The use of digital technology has therefore fulfilled several functions, such as a customer service which is provided through responding to feedback. More importantly though is that this is also an example of co-creation. The comments and feedback informed the product development, so those who contributed to it then have a vested interest in the app itself, thus creating product and brand loyalty. It is precisely this type of co-creation and product loyalty that commercial business brands are wishing to generate in order to respond to changing consumer behaviours. Cultural audiences seem to be increasingly demanding the same type of co-creation and are willing to engage and contribute content. This is not only vital for the cultural organisation in its own right but it is also of great value to any potential business partner.

One of the biggest challenges for brands in terms of co-creation is firstly making a resonating call for action and secondly ensuring the contributions are of 'value'. What a cultural organisation such as the Brooklyn Museum has demonstrated, is that the cultural sector can make these calls for actions and they have engaging content in abundance which audiences and users respond to. This is an asset not only for the cultural organisation itself but also for potential partners.

Although the Brooklyn Museum App is still in its infancy, this could be the beginning of a future trend whereby every cultural organisation has a similar tool to engage users on digital mobile devices.

This attitude and approach to sharing and allowing content to be played with is sure to nurture commitment and loyalty from audiences, which in turn helps to ensure audience contributions are useful and of value. By experimenting in this way, the Brooklyn Museum is establishing how best to tap into the power of its audiences and stay ahead of the curve.

Of course there are legitimate concerns over copyright and licensing of some content, but what organisations are increasingly finding by using co-creation is that by giving a way a little valuable content, greater audience commitment, engagement and potentially longer-term revenue can be generated. The next thing for the Brooklyn Museum to consider is how to generate income through this particular type of audience engagement, whether that be earned income or through donations.

iPhone art

Creativity and innovation are core to Apple's brand and these dimensions are inextricably linked to the cultural sector. Among consumers, Apple's products project an image of creativity, and the development of this new technology has directly inspired the creation of art.

Perhaps the prime example of this is the recent advent of 'iPhone Art'. One of the initial apps released was a tool which allowed users to create images using their iPhone screen. The 'Brushes' app is not a mere distraction from answering emails though, many well known artists have begun to use it as an entirely new medium. For example, Jorge Colombo recently designed a front cover for The New

Yorker using this app.¹ As this becomes an art form in its own right, websites and flickr streams have been created showcasing these works. Another artist, Xoan Baltar, has managed to craft some quite exquisite works on his phone which are very popular online.

Perhaps the most notable champion of this ever-growing culture though is British artist David Hockney. Considering Hockney's contribution to the Pop Art movement, his involvement and enthusiasm for his iPhone holds a larger symbolism. Although you may have to contain your mirth when he states how he likes to proudly store his iPhone on an easel, his comments in the London Evening Standard states: *'This is all new territory for art.'*²

There is much debate about the extent to which digital and online versions of cultural content are authentic, because the technology arguably does make the audience one step removed from the original. The vital question is what if the original is the digital version? This artform plays to the strengths of original authenticity: to use the words of Pine & Gilmore – the marketing and consumer culture gurus- because it is new and the first stage of this new type of art.³ Indeed, the significance here is not only about the economic and marketing potential of cultural dabbling in digital technology, but also about the unexpected artistic authenticity that has arisen from these artificial devices.

The links to culture, creativity and innovation as well as design quality are all fundamental reasons why the iPhone is the coolest brand today and Apple the third.⁴ These creative apps developed by a 'cultural brand' has encouraged some cultural institutions, like the Brooklyn Museum, to explore the artistic and audience engagement potential of Apple's devices. But this experimentation is still very much in its infancy.

Conclusions

The nature of mobile communications devices has created an opportunity for a new type of partnership between businesses and arts organisations. By creating their own content in this format, arts organisations can enter into a relationship with the technology itself, as well as with a community of users. This is enabled and supplemented by the growing affection between contemporary artists and mobile technology in an organic and creative manner, which has even created a new artform to engage with.

The Brooklyn Museum is engaging with apps in a fresh and dynamic way that exemplifies the huge benefits a cultural organisation can receive by working towards product development based on co-creation. Although we can only speculate as to the future of these projects, this case serves as a suitable introduction to technology becoming an integral part of contemporary art, and the potential benefits for organisations willing to embrace the digital age, especially around audience engagement and consequently the consumer engagement potential cult.

¹ www.iphonepaintings.com

² London Evening Standard, *David Hockney: ipriest of art*, 30 April 2009
<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23683409-david-hockney-ipriest-of-art.do>

³ For more on the role of art in rendering authentic see *Beyond Experience: culture, consumers and brands*, by Arts & Business, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, 2009

⁴ *Cool Brands 2009/10* by the Centre for Brand Analysis, July 2009