Producing Interactive Media- The Production Process

One of the first things to consider about the production of interactive media is that it is often produced more effectively by a team of people with expertise in specific areas rather than by one person wearing all caps at once. Therefore it is common for many producers of interactive media to work as a production team. There are a variety of issues that need to be addressed, in consultation with the client, at the commencement of production of interactive media, such as:-

• **Define the objective of the product-**
Is it for instructional purposes?(ie, users must learn specific information from it or gain specific skills eg educational packages)
or for entertainment purposes ?(users play some sort of game)
Informational purposes? eg shopping centre display
A combination of the above eg museum exhibition.
Corporate presentation?

If it is instructional, then the scope of the training problem needs to be defined- what exactly do users need to come away having learnt?
However, in all cases, clarity about the objective of the product- what is hoped to be achieved- must be ascertained at the beginning of project commencement.

•**Define the user, or target audience-**
Who are you trying to reach with your product? What is their age, sex, language, nationality? What are their concerns and interests? The more tightly defined your user group is, the more likely you will be to produce an appropriate product, and one that is pleasurable to use. With the increasing use of interactive media in publishing it is easy to see that products are being developed with particular audiences in mind
eg From Alice To Ocean is targeted to adults; Beethoven's 9th to approx 10-16 year olds; Just Grandma and Me (a very fun interactive that is on display at the Powerhouse Laserlink exhibition) to 3-8 year olds.

Definition of the user group will have ramifications on the design of the user interface, graphic design, soundtrack design as well as on the language of the subject matter itself.

•**Define the content**
This relates back to the objective of the product. If the product is instructional- eg a flight simulator, a Year 10 biology curriculum- then the content of the product will be extremely important, since there may be "tests" incorporated into the product that the user cannot "pass" without successfully understanding included information. Even if the product is not "instructional", content must be defined. What is the subject matter to

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be covered? What must be included in order to help achieve the desired objective of the product?

•**Define the tone & manner**
Again this relates back to both the objective and the desired user group. Once these are defined, it is easy to make decisions about the manner of presentation- style of language, the graphics, interface features, use of metaphor and icons etc. Products targeted to children require a different overall "tone" to adult targeted products. Additionally, entertainment products may desire or require a different tone to educational products. Much of this may seem obvious but we can observe where some products seem to get it wrong- having a major impact on whether or not users actually want to use the product.

Define the delivery specifications
Where will the product be used- a museum, at home on a PC, a Macintosh? What model will it need to run on? Will it only run smoothly on latest model computers? Could there be a problem if product is designed for wide range use over a variety of models eg schools. Will the monitors be colour or B&W? It is important to know where the product is intended to end up- again relating back to objective.

All of the above points are quite complex, and may require extensive liaison between the producers of the media and the client (who may be a publisher, an educational body, a corporation etc). The scope of an interactive product is therefore often so broad that a team of people will work on it's development. Skills are required in the following specialist areas:-
•Subject Matter Expert (may be the "client")
•Project designer (often an Instructional Designer or producer of other media)
•Programmer
•Author
•Graphic Designer

One person may take on several roles, but it is easy to see that a large project would require input from several specialists. It's asking quite a lot for one person to be a programmer, author and graphic designer for example.... (The Parliament Stack was produced by one person- while that is a great achievement, we can pose the question- could it have gained something by having other people work on specific aspects of it?)

Additionally, the "brainstorming" of a project will be much more fruitful with the input of several people. So the good news is, you don't have to be all things at once. You might wear a few caps, particularly if your budget is small, but you are most likely to produce a superior product if you work in a team.