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JUST PUSH PLAY: WHERE RESEARCH MEETS VIDEO, ONLINE

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Abstract

The term "research" means different things to different people. In terms of outcomes, it is often associated with purely academic formats – the journal article, the chapter, the lecture. However, things are rapidly changing, especially in the way knowledges are generated and shared. So, what happens when we grab some Indigenous legal and policy analysis and mix it up with Web 2.0 design/development expertise? What we get is an exciting pilot project that aims to enhance research dissemination through digital video and online interfaces. This paper shares insights into the collaborative process of creating a pilot research portal.

Introduction

At the time of writing, the Howard government is rushing through "emergency" intervention bills promoted as protecting Indigenous children in the Northern Territory. Despite the long-term calls for urgent and genuine resourcing to support protection of children this ad hoc measure has outraged leaders and community members across the Territory. Why? In reality, this is a Trojan horse that undeniably attacks the integrity of Aboriginal land rights and self-determination in Northern Territory. It has been described as constitutionally valid but highly discriminatory and yet seems highly likely to pass through with the bipartisan support of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). This is relevant to this discussion here because it highlights the rising need for strategies that strengthen Indigenous voices of our communities, voices that are often critical of mainstream actions and opinions.

At the same time, we are experiencing the arrival of the "YouTube" campaigning phenomenon. Indeed, in this election year both the ALP and Liberal parties have launched a rampant though somewhat creative campaign using the YouTube platform. At another level, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has recently confirmed what we all know, that mainstream Australia watch DVD's, movies and the internet in huge amounts (ABS 2007). Therefore, it is not hard to consider that if we can provide resources that people can "just push play" then perhaps we can influence paternalistic decision-making and popular "racist" perceptions that seem to encircle Indigenous worlds in Australia. These resources are also an excellent educational vehicle for our own community members on the critical legal and policy issues raised.

This paper explores whether it is that simple in the context of an Indigenous legal and policy research agenda that aims to promote and enhance Indigenous self-determination in Australia. More specifically, it details collaborative insights involved in a pilot research portal project called the "Pilot Portal", where Indigenous legal and policy analysis meets video, online. The Pilot Portal aims to provide initially, Indigenous legal/policy analysis through online and video interfaces. It draws on the research work of Jumbunna Research Unit and the important insights of our communities.

Video and research in this context

Video is really all about storing moving image, from the old analogue cassettes to newer digital formats like

mpeg-4. Indigenous peoples have been using video technology for decades. We are all inspired by Walpiri Media Association and the pirate TV station of the mid 1980s (Hinkson, 2002, p. 202). Video has also proven to be an effective tool for cultural revitalisation, storytelling and dynamic artistic expressions. Filmmakers also share this innovative history, producing and directing some of the best screen projects shown in Australia (AFC, 2007). As such, video has been experienced, to some degree, in a positive light and is often spoken of in inspirational terms. Message Stick's film festival is an absolute brilliant example of the power of the moving image and the responsiveness and interest of the mainstream community in Indigenous stories for the screen.

Research on the other hand means vastly different things to different people. It still evokes feelings of distrust for many communities. Today there are a number of Indigenous academics and researchers that engage with this tension from within various educational institutions. For most, this involves much more than just the academic exercise of research. It can form part of a strategic and action based intervention for Indigenous self-determination. New ways of doing research now demand a stricter adherence to Indigenous protocols and where possible form part of Indigenous aspirations for self-determination in often highly localised contexts. The work of Linda Smith and others has inspired a raft of work in developing decolonising methodologies around the world (e.g., Smith, 1999). In Australia, Martin Nakata and others have developed Indigenous standpoint theories, which are also helping us to position ourselves in this complex nexus between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems – a dynamic corpus of knowledge (Nakata, 2007). It is impossible in this paper to give justice to the decades of exceptional work by Indigenous peoples in the reclaiming of our histories, voices and worldviews. What we do know is that in this academic world written formats still underpin the power of the word. Creative practices such as video and performance have presented alternative processes and outcomes to these more traditional formats. Focusing on the use of video, we see the influence that technology has had on this form of research innovation.

Rapid advances in information communication technologies have also driven researchers to explore the viabilities and impacts of the digital interface. Digital technologies have proven to be a powerful tool within the fields of visual anthropology and experimental ethnography (Deger, 2006; Pink, 2001). The diverse hybrid realm of this often transdisciplinary work also evokes the important local Australian work of Jenny Fraser (Fraser, 2006; Verran et al., 2007), Michael Christie and the Charles Darwin University team, and Victor Steffenson and Jacqueline Gothe (TKRP, 2007). There is also a growing body of exceptional work in the area of Indigenous knowledge and collections

protocols (Nakata & Langton, 2005). We also look forward to more of Peter Radoll's work in the area of information communication technologies and Indigenous uptake.

Of significance for the portal project is the ground breaking local work done by Indigenous experts in the area of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights. It has been argued elsewhere that relevant ICIP matters should be held as a key consideration right at the forefront of the digital frontier (De Santolo, 2007). Terri Janke, Jenny Fraser, and Robynne Quiggin have produced significant work in this area amongst others (Janke & Fraser 2002; Quiggin, 2007). Likewise, film protocol discourse has emerged from key Indigenous film and arts experts such as Lester Bostok (Bostok, 1997). This critical body of work has helped to illuminate a blueprint for creative practice using video in research.

Jumbunna Research Unit is an institutional research example that focuses on strategically engaging with critical legal and policy analysis for the benefit of Indigenous communities. The Pilot Portal steps a bit to the side of most of the work described above but maintains a strong recognition of the need for caution and guidance in terms of ICIP considerations.

Jumbunna New Media Project

The Pilot Portal has resulted from a commitment made by Jumbunna Research Unit to enhance research outcomes and ways of dissemination. The video and new media work at Jumbunna has manifested through the Jumbunna New Media Project. This has been informed both by grass roots strategies around Indigenous media guerrilla film making and strategic theoretical insights in the area of critical legal studies, creative practice and decolonising methodologies. It has therefore embraced a fieldwork and practice driven research approach that sits well beyond the desktop. Essentially, we have focused on developing some of the legal and policy analysis through a creative practice interface (De Santolo, 2006). This has involved projects with action and performative research elements, new media outcomes including DVD's and now a pilot web based project – the "research portal".

One of our most effective new media collaborations has been with Uncle Chicka Dixon – a highly respected elder and a champion of civil and Indigenous rights in Australia. In 2005, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning was honoured to have him present a personal account of the history for the struggle for justice in Australia. This collaboration took two years and it involved a genuine creative partnership and relationship building within the process. A basic assembly edit was the foundation for the project and postproduction involved a long-term commitment to consultation with and guidance from Uncle Chicka. Regular visits with a laptop allowed for private viewing

in a comfortable and private space. During this process, other assets were included on request. After many rough cuts and viewings a visual story came together that reflected the inspirational vision of Uncle Chicka's remarkable living legacy. The viewing process allowed feedback on the rough cut and it was decided that Uncle Chicka would add some reflective comments on the speech and this was also an opportunity to mention a couple of things that needed to be included. This manifest in the DVD was a short extra – much like a special feature. Photos and some archival footage also added a colourful informing touch.

Commitment to this process allowed for the collaboration to transform itself strategically into an appropriate cultural pathway through the complex blurry world of cross disciplines and cross platform hybridity. Once completed the DVD received excellent feedback and is now used by Uncle Chicka as a tool at speeches and other events. During this collaboration, there were a few queries from the community as to the online availability of such an important educational resource. This raised a whole host of other issues but was considered seriously enough to warrant investigation into an online portal for such work. This had strong potential to effectively disseminate and engage our research with a strong sense of online immediacy.

Urgency in collaboration

Given recent events in Australia there is a sense of urgency to creating platforms for the sharing of critical Indigenous legal and policy perspectives. Given the urgency of this research agenda, we are progressing with the soft launch of the Pilot Portal as a matter of priority. However as this is a prototype, we are currently seeking feedback and review from key recognised experts in our community.

Collaboration is a fundamental aspect to these strategies. It evokes and strengthens relationships and understanding across cultures and disciplines. If expertise is shared in an Indigenous driven, collaborative way, outcomes are more likely to recognise ICIP considerations at the forefront. Feedback and criticism is a vital aspect of this process. With creative projects it is extremely easy to cause emotional responses and unintended insult or misrepresentation. We all make mistakes. As a pilot project we are absolutely committed to dealing with criticisms and challenges as effectively as possible. With this project we will be inviting a number of experts in various fields to provide feedback on this soft launch.

Scripting critical legal analysis

Legal analysis is often framed in complex legal language or legalese. This is especially the case when it comes to discussion of complex constitutional issues.

Jumbunna Research Unit is committed to articulating these issues in plain English that allows for the issues to be peeled back and accessible to our communities. This commitment flows into the script writing process when presenting legal issues in multimedia. This process allows the research team to creatively enhance key thematic issues throughout the legal explanation. It also draws in other emotive tools such as music, stylised images and other dynamic visual assets that help to frame these themes within the community context. Essentially, it helps to humanise abstract concepts and theories.

A classic example of this is the new media DVD "5126" which was a new media collaboration that reflected on the impact of the 1967 Referendum – 40 years on. These insights were offered through critical Indigenous voices, highlighting the importance of an Indigenous rights driven agenda for change. It described how successive Australian Governments have failed to live up to the aspirations of those who campaigned and voted for this important constitutional amendment. The piece also celebrated the vibrant history of Indigenous protest, ultimately recognising the 1967 referendum as a momentous victory for Indigenous peoples. Thematically it drew on the timeless strength and key role of Indigenous women and families in the rights struggle and visually presented this through stylised evocations. The team joined forces with expert documentary filmmakers and cinematographer Fabio Cavadini and Amanda King. Their mentoring role infused the collaboration with crucial filmic style. In this project, Larissa Behrendt developed a paper as the foundational concept and script for the new media collaboration. The paper was provided to the conference goers alongside the DVD presentation on big screen at the Gilbert and Tobin Constitutional Law Conference in 2007. "5126" was eventually distributed in a Special Referendum Edition of the National Indigenous Times. It will be one of the key themes to feature in full on the Pilot Portal.

Online collaboration

The Pilot Portal

In its initial phases, the Pilot Portal will be mostly content delivery in the form of video and articles. In future stages, the Portal will grow to include Web 2.0 technologies to grow a community of users and to encourage discussion, debate and collaboration.

The concept of Web 2.0

The term "Web 2.0" was coined in 2003 by O'Reilly Media. It refers to a generation of web-based communities that allow for collaboration and sharing of data and information between users. Web 2.0 is commonly defined as using "the web as a platform",

whereby the traditional website consisting of isolated, static content develops into a source of shared content, therefore becoming a computing platform which delivers web-based applications to users.

The combined use of technologies such as blogs, wikis and RSS has allowed for a more flexible approach to the distribution of information which, in turn, encourages open communication, collaboration, and sharing of information.

Web 2.0 cannot be described with defined boundaries, as it is a term which describes how certain technologies can be used together to facilitate collaboration and communication. For example, a website that simply contains a blog cannot be defined as a Web 2.0 application. As such, Tim O'Reilly has described the concept of Web 2.0 as having four levels of hierarchy (O'Reilly, 2007):

Level 3: The application can only exist in an online environment. Its foundations are drawn from other online applications and human connections. Level 3 applications are primarily driven by collaborative online activity and grow as more users participate collaboratively. Some examples of websites that can be defined as Level 3 are eBay, Wikipedia and del.icio.us.

Level 2: This application can operate offline, but there are significant advantages to it existing online. O'Reilly uses a photo management application as an offline example, however an application such as this can become more powerful by existing online as it has similar potential to Flickr which functions as a shared, public photo database and community tagging.

Level 1: This application can exist offline, however it can gain additional features by going online. iTunes is a good example of a Level 1 application, with the main feature of the application (media management and playback) being offline, however the online music store component brings additional features.

Level 0: This application primarily takes place online, however would work just as well offline where the data is stored (or cached) on a user's computer. Google Maps exists within this category, although it is important to note that it could jump to Level 2 if users were able to contribute to the application.

Web 2.0 technologies

There are many complex technologies used within the Web 2.0 framework that are constantly evolving. Just some of the technologies commonly found in Web 2.0 applications are listed below.

Blogs: Blogs, or more specifically, web logs, are websites where the owners post opinions or news on any subject matter, ranging from politics to hobbies. Blogs are commonly used as personal online diaries. They are made up of posts submitted by the author in chronological order and usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Typically, blogs contain text, images and links to other websites related to the

topic of the entry. An important aspect of blogs is the ability for readers of the blog to leave comments on the posts.

Wikis: Wikis are collaborative websites that can be edited directly by users of the wiki. Wikipedia is an excellent example of how a wiki functions. A wiki provides the capability for collaborative writing and editing of documents using a web browser. A single page in a wiki is known as a "wiki page", and the entire mass of pages, connected by hyperlinks are referred to as the "wiki". In its simplest form, a wiki is a database where content can be created, edited and searched. Wikis are more commonly being used within corporate organisations for collaborative editing and maintenance of internal documentation. Schools and other educational institutions are also using wikis as an educational tool with their students.

Whilst wikis have the functionality available to anyone to create and edit content, the issue of users with ill intentions and incorrect information exists. To counter this, many wikis have developed methods to detect and remove such content. Another method is to place new users onto a kind of probation period where their trustworthiness on the system needs to be proven before allowing them to become full members of the wiki.

RSS: RSS, or Really Simple Syndication, is a format whereby content that is frequently updated, such as blogs or news headlines is published via an RSS document. RSS documents, also known as "feeds", usually contain a summary of the content on a website. These feeds are then read by software called "feed readers" or "aggregators". Users who subscribe to the feeds use the feed readers which check for the most recent content and provides it directly to the user. RSS is an easy way for users to keep up to date with their most visited website without having to manually return to each website to check for new content.

Podcasts/Vodcasts: Podcasts generally refer to audio/music files, and vodcasts to video files. Podcasts and vodcasts are distributed online using aggregators and are played back on personal media players. When users subscribe to a podcast or vodcast feed, new content will automatically be downloaded to the subscriber's computer.

How the Pilot Portal fits in

Referring back to the four levels of hierarchy defined by O'Reilly, the Pilot Portal in its initial pilot stage will operate as a Level 1 application with plans to progress to a Level 2 application in the future. The functionality to be developed is detailed in Table 1.

The functionality listed for Phase 2 of the Pilot Portal will be dependant on the feedback received during the initial pilot phase. By developing functionality such as subscription-based podcasts and vodcasts, and RSS feeds when new blog entries are posted or

projects added, we will be creating a platform to share Indigenous perspectives.

Web 2.0 issues

Whilst the concept of Web 2.0 applications and the collaborative, content-sharing nature of these online platforms offer a multitude of potential to share information, the development of the Pilot Portal needs to take into account the distribution of media and sensitive content to the world wide web. As the project develops, care needs to be taken to remain sensitive to the Indigenous intellectual property contained within the media, namely the videos and audio files on the site.

The content-sharing characteristics that Web 2.0 applications provide also result in blurry boundaries when it comes to copyright and IP issues. As such, given the potentially sensitive nature of the content, and ICIP considerations, care will be taken when distributing content. For example, certain RSS feeds could be offered to selected websites, rather than being available to the general public. Access to particular functionality such as a wiki or uploading of content would also be restricted to approved users and such content would be modifiable by the system administrators.

Establishing online communities

After a website has been launched, it needs users to contribute and collaborate to the content, particularly if it is has been developed as a Web 2.0 application. To have a user base who visits and contributes regularly to the website requires the establishment of an online community.

To successfully establish an online community, a sense of belonging between users needs to emerge. This can be facilitated by helping new users introduce themselves to the group and encouraging conversation between users through the use of forums, chats and inviting comments on blog posts. The language and manner of the content on the website also reinforces the type of community that is created and the people who are drawn towards it. If they are conducive to the website, member initiatives should be supported. Whilst free discussions and initiatives should be encouraged, good administration should also be practiced, such as acting immediately on negative posts and comments that are detrimental to the objectives of the website.

With the Pilot Portal in particular, an online community would be encouraged to participate in discussions around current Indigenous issues, and reflect on articles and media posted to the site. In Phase 2 of the site, a potential new feature would allow users to discuss and post comments on the articles and media on the website. By promoting free flowing discussions and enabling users to contribute to articles, papers and multimedia the website will be leveraged to achieve a higher level of interactivity and allow for dialogue and analysis of current Indigenous issues through a wide-reaching medium such as the internet.

Key working elements

Indigenous driven

The Pilot Portal is Indigenous driven from its foundational context right through to the design and collaborative outcomes. Indigenous self-determination is at the heart of this research innovation. The information provided through the Pilot Portal critically engages legal and policy issues from an Indigenous perspective. Design elements are inspired and created in light of cultural and ICIP considerations.

The interface also aims to be user friendly and accessible despite obvious challenges in working within technological and resource constraints. Indigenous researchers at Jumbunna Research Unit will manage the Pilot Portal for the entirety of its online life – three to six months.

Table 1. Phase 1 and 2 of the study.

Phase 1 – Pilot	
Blog	Published by various researchers.
Video streaming	Video can be played via a streaming server.
Phase 2 – Release	
RSS	Feeds from the blogs to be provided for subscription by users.
Podcast/Vodcast	Audio and video files to be podcasted/vodcasted and available for subscription by users.
Wiki	Potential addition of a wiki to allow for collaboration between users.
Content upload	Potential addition of a content management feature to allow for upload of articles by users.
CMS	A Content Management System to be implemented to allow for easy updating of the website.
Search functionality	As the content of the website grows, the addition of a search functionality is vital. The search will allow users to search by project, media type, category or specific keywords.

The reach of online platforms

Using an online platform for the delivery of the Pilot Portal allows for the content to reach a much larger, dispersed audience. The use of video and other multimedia aspects is also expected to draw in a wider audience. The online environment combined with multimedia formats will also encourage users who may not necessarily be of an academic background to contribute feedback and opinions in a medium that is familiar and which provides an online community that is welcoming to new members.

Design enhancement

A number of design considerations have been taken into account whilst designing and developing the Pilot Portal. The major consideration is usability. The Pilot Portal has been designed to be user-friendly to account for users who are not proficient at using computers or the internet. This is a fairly straightforward task for the development of the pilot phase of the project. However, a more in-depth analysis will need to be employed as Phase 2 is developed to take into account the increased functionality offered by the website.

Additional functionality planned for Phase 2 of the website is the development of a Content Management System (CMS) to be implemented within the website. The CMS will allow for easy editing of the website and uploading of any new resources to the website. It will also be used as a tool to sort articles and media into categories as the website grows. This will provide users with search functionality for searching the content of the site by a variety of criteria including project, media type and specific keywords.

Measuring success

Whilst the launching of the Pilot Portal is the next major milestone, the work does not end there. Various methods of site analysis will be used to determine the success of the website. Here, we measure the success of the site as whether it meets its overall goal – to provide Indigenous legal and policy analysis through video and online interfaces.

In the initial prototype phase, we will seek feedback from the experts evaluating the site. This will assist us, in the initial stages, to determine whether the Pilot Portal meets its goals and to identify any potential issues before going live to the public.

Once live, we will gain feedback from actual website users in the form of a short online survey. The survey will be mostly in regards to the content on the website and the overall design and usability of the site.

In future phases of the Pilot Portal, success of the website could be measured by the level of participation – or the spirit of community – found through the use of various collaborative Web 2.0 features.

From a purely "numbers" point of view, the success of a website can also be measured by the amount of traffic (website "visitors") to the site. Traffic can be increased through good marketing, both online and offline, high ranking search engine results and incentives for users (potentially in the form of competitions, games or prizes).

If at any stage during the analysis of the success of the website, there is negative feedback or suggested improvements, this feedback will be reviewed to ensure the aims of the Pilot Portal are preserved.

When it doesn't play

Issues of access – digital divide

Whilst the online environment is ideal for distributing information and encouraging collaboration and sharing between users, the digital divide still exists for remote communities of Australia. The Australia Bureau of Statistics in 2002 reported that 56% of Indigenous people had used a computer over the previous 12 months and 41% had accessed the Internet over the previous 12 months. The ABS report also stated that the use of information technology by Indigenous people in non-remote areas was approximately double the amount of those in remote areas. As technologies become more advanced and the infrastructure for internet access more widespread, the digital divide is bound to become smaller.

Access and format options

Taking into account the issues of slow internet access, the portal will be designed with W3C standards and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). By complying with these standards, the website will be optimised for fast delivery of the content.

Phase 1 of the website will utilise a streaming server for delivery of any video and audio content. The use of a streaming server whereby all media is delivered by a provider and continuously received and displayed to a user, compares to the progressive download technique where the video is downloaded to the user's computer before playback, will result in a faster playback for remote communities whose internet connection may not be of a high speed. Streaming servers are also capable of delivering more advanced features and control over the video, including tracking and reporting of video usage and the ability to determine the bandwidth available to the user and serve the appropriate format of video.

Is anyone really interested outside the office?

There is no doubt that Indigenous communities want good critical information in dynamic video formats. Responses to the Uncle Chicka DVD have proven

that beyond a doubt. There is a strong message out there – Indigenous peoples want their own stories and perspectives shared and aired through public and private broadcasting platforms. National Indigenous TV (NITV) has just been launched and for the first time we are aggregating content for our own people on our own broadcaster. It is inevitable that NITV will slowly and strategically assert itself in the cross platform – online world. So we argue that there is potential to reach and captivate audiences as interest grows and technology becomes more accessible.

Just push play?

We believe the Pilot Portal will be effective in terms of developing good prototypes and with these issues in mind we move towards a collaboration project to bring light to disturbing developments in the Northern Territory. This is ongoing and we raise the following critical issues that we will be considering amongst others:

* **Feedback and protocols:** The soft launch and review process will gather feedback on the content and online platform potential for the Pilot Portal. It is hoped that insights will cover ICIP considerations and any protocol issues that may be applicable.
* **Capacity and sustainability:** There is a genuine commitment to developing projects like this sustainably so that capacity is maximised alongside strategic use of resources. Collaboration allows for the sharing of knowledge and insights and the project is committed to reporting development through forums such as the Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conferences in Australia.
* **Technological shifts and access:** Rapid advances in technology can determine and influence the accessibility and relevance of projects in the long term. This Pilot Portal is subject to these influences and this will be strategically monitored.

Conclusion

At the very least, this collaboration has provided insights into the process of bringing together Indigenous legal/policy and Web 2.0 expertises. It is fundamentally an exciting project because it is Indigenous driven and fully committed to Indigenous self-determination. There are ongoing challenges to the longitudinal success of the Pilot Portal – capacity and sustainability must be considered in light of ever – present technological advancement and resourcing issues. It is hoped that feedback and review will help to shape a robust pilot portal into a dynamic resource for the community. The Pilot Portal prototype has potential to develop into a hub that provides powerful streams of information for the strategic collaboration

and dynamic dissemination of good information. The Pilot Portal's web links are also easily shared across vast transformative networks of solidarity – these Indigenous networks span the globe (e.g., Conscious Collaborations, Indigenous Action Media, 2007). From research and analysis to blogs and other creative expressions, it will be engaging for our youth. So half of the hard work is now done and we look forward to the next phase of this exciting collaboration. We urge you to not "just push play", but to actively engage with our growing online community in the true creative spirit of self-determination.

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Juanita Ypinazar is a descendant of Kuku Yulangi from the Cooktown area. Since completing a Bachelor of Multimedia at Griffith University, she has developed websites for a number of organisations, and online Flash games for Message Stick at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. With a background in e-learning and multimedia, Juanita has worked at organisations such as TAFE to design engaging and interactive content for online training.