

Watershed Case Study: Arts and Industry 2005

Under Blue Skies: The Watershed/HP Labs Partnership

The full report is available to download at:

<http://www.watershed.co.uk/reports/UnderBlueSkies.pdf>

National and regional government strategy identifies Creative Industries as a sector in which the relationship between innovation, knowledge transfer, productivity and marketplace performance is integral to market success. Through its strategic alliance with Hewlett Packard Labs, Watershed has created an exceptional example of a public/private sector alliance where the pooling of knowledge, expertise and resources underpins innovative research and development.

The Watershed/HP Labs partnership began in 1999 when both organisations became founding members of the Bristol Creative Technology Network. With the HP led Mobile Bristol programme Watershed has acted as a research partner, sharing an interest in exploring artist and user experiences of digital media beyond the confines of the cinema or gallery. Turning Watershed into a 'living lab space' with artists creating new content for visitors to 'try out'.

In 2004 Watershed partnered with HP to create the SE3D project. It commissioned 11 groups of UK animators and gave access to an experimental Utility 3D Rendering Service. As well as offering a multi-user industry test for this cutting-edge research technology, the SE3D project delivered 11 new 3D animations from new UK talent, films which have been featuring at festivals around the world. The completed SE3D films provided HP Labs with a tangible example of utility computing that can be used to promote their services within other industries and established a model of collaboration that has attracted interest from across the UK:

"The project embeds many of our current concerns, including networking as a business model, access to new and expansive technologies, new distribution avenues, mobilisation of production funding, changes in core business practice and the ownership of IP in the content that is created by the research process." Julie Taylor, Creative Industries Manager at the Arts and Humanities Research Council

Creative outcomes are a driving factor in the partnership - both in terms of the research undertaken and in the production of new work. Artist/Composer Jo Hyde explains:

"For me this is the beginning of a journey rather than the end. Working with the HP Labs' team and their utility rendering service has been a different and much more rigorous approach to that I am used to. I know that the techniques and ways of working I've developed through SE3D will have a wider application to other projects I undertake in the future"

HP's John Manley thinks Watershed is ideally positioned to function as the front-end, collaborative hub within a Digital Media Service Provider 'eco-system'. He feels that:

"In the digital media industry the only way to stay competitive is to use the emergent technologies before others adopt them. It's the pioneers, early adopters and risk-takers that succeed, and because of what's here in Bristol we're in a strong position to become a leader on the world stage"

As a stakeholder in digital innovation, Watershed has an important role to play in supporting new technology-based practices and their successful adoption by the creative industries - especially in the cultural sectors. As Dick Penny explains:

"We want to be at the heart of making new things happen through new collaborations, especially those bringing public and private sector interests together. We can increase the 'value for money' payback on investment by drawing new and diverse players into the creative game, especially enlightened commercial players who are committed to innovation, exploring new territories and knowledge exchange. Our fruitful partnership with Hewlett Packard is one example of this approach."

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