

**Australia Council for the Arts  
Strategy paper**

# **ARTS CONTENT FOR THE DIGITAL ERA**

**June 2009**

## Executive summary

The Australia Council for the Arts has adopted six strategic priorities to help focus its efforts on critical areas for the arts into the future. Arts content for the digital era is one of these strategic priorities. This strategy includes information on current and future work in this area and outlines changes in the arts and media landscape and how that will inform future initiatives.

The Australia Council currently:

- Supports digital broadcasts of major performing arts events to regional cinemas and public screens around Australia;
- Supports new work, research and residency projects for artists who are creating content for digital platforms like virtual worlds and video games;
- Conducts research on the impact of digital technology on the arts including book publishing, music and the performing arts;
- Helps build the capacity of the arts community through collaborations with the broader digital content industry.

The Australia Council developed this strategy to help our organisation and the arts sector to understand the big picture of the digital environment. It will also ensure we make informed responses to the impact of digital technology on the creation and enjoyment of the arts. A glossary is provided at the end of this document.

The strategy focuses on four subject areas:

### **New audiences:** *promoting access to arts content*

Access to arts content is changing dramatically due to the proliferation of digital media devices such as mobile phones and portable music players, and improved digital infrastructures such as broadband and wireless technology. Arts content is now just as likely to be enjoyed on the move or at home as it is in a gallery, museum or theatre. As digital infrastructure improves, national broadcasters, telecommunications companies and online publishers will play an increasingly pivotal role in the distribution of arts content.

Our goal is to help the sector better understand audiences and their behaviour in the digital era, and to promote greater access to Australian-sourced arts content across digital platforms locally, regionally and internationally.

### **New domains:** *evolving arts content and practice*

Artists are employing new technologies that invite audiences to move beyond passively viewing, watching or listening to arts content, instead encouraging them to try wearing, stepping inside and contributing to its creation. Many artists, especially those from more traditional art mediums, are grappling with these new arts practices, content forms and new artist–audience relationships. Because of this, many artists are looking for assistance to navigate these new domains.

Our goal is to raise the profile of emerging artforms and support artists to evolve their arts practice in new domains.

**New incomes:** *linking arts content and commerce*

Arts content in digital format can be copied, shared and even repurposed. This makes it difficult to protect and monetise content, turning the traditional business model which is based on one-off pieces and events on its head. Arts content in the digital era also competes in a wider, global marketplace. While audiences go to the theatre primarily because they want to see a live performance, they may turn on their television (TV), computer, mobile phone or gaming device for all sorts of reasons – information, communication, education or entertainment. Now, more than ever, arts content needs to be easy to find and easy to access in this larger playing field.

Our goal is to continue building the capacity of the sector to adopt appropriate business, marketing, copyright and distribution models for the digital era.

**New support:** *producing and preserving arts content*

Increasingly, artists are developing work that will end up on a screen of some kind. This may require them to learn new skills and move between new and old publishing and presentation formats – books, web, live performance and mobile phones. Digital technology is also causing us to review how we preserve and extend the life and reach of arts content through promoting access to digital archives. We understand that existing support infrastructure needs to evolve in line with new practice, both to encourage artists to learn from and collaborate with the broader digital content industries, and also to ensure the preservation of arts content in digital form.

Our goal is to offer support that is fitting for a new cross-platform arts landscape and to encourage the creation of and access to arts content through digital archives.

## Introduction

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Digital technology has occasioned a revolution in the way people interact with each other, retailers, governments and the arts. Australians now spend more time using audiovisual media than they spend on any other recreational activity.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in 2008, 88% of Australian households owned a device for playing computer games.<sup>2</sup>

The digital 'revolution' is set to continue. In less than five years, nearly every Australian household and business is expected to be able to access data-rich content such as games, TV, enriched social networking and movies as a result of the Australian Government's roll-out of the National Broadband Network. In less than four years, all Australian households will have converted to digital television (DTV), with its greater number of interactive channels and high definition services. Access to the Internet over mobile phones will be commonplace.

Radio once revolutionised people's access to classical music recordings. Over the next three to five years the introduction of multiple DTV channels, the proliferation of home gaming devices and the ready availability of the mobile web will become central to the production, distribution and access to arts content.

Many artists and audience members are already engaged in digital change. Since the earliest days of digital technology artists have been experimenting in the creation and distribution of their work.

Audiences, too, are innovators. They seek out art which inspires them, stimulates their minds and whispers to their souls. Australian audiences are enjoying arts content from all around the world via global digital channels.

However, not all Australian artists or arts companies have the means or the knowledge to engage with digital technology. These artists risk losing existing audiences and income streams, while also missing out on new audiences, ways of doing business and methods of creating work.

Australian artists and arts companies need improved digital infrastructure, content production, and commercialisation capabilities in order to capitalise on digital opportunities and compete with other sources of content such as film, television and global offerings.<sup>3</sup> A concerted effort by government is needed to ensure that Australians continue to have access to Australian-sourced arts content across the spectrum of digital platforms.

In October 2007, the Australia Council for the Arts adopted six strategic priorities to focus its efforts on critical areas for the future of the arts in Australia. 'Arts content for the digital era' is a strategic priority that responds to the current and anticipated future impact of the growth of digital technology and communications on the arts sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4172.0 - Arts and Culture in Australia: A Statistical Overview, 2008 (Second Edition) , <http://www.abs.gov.au>

<sup>2</sup> Interactive Australia 2009, Interactive Entertainment Association of Australia

<sup>3</sup> Digital Content Industry Action Agenda, Unlocking the Potential: Summary, DCITA, April 2006; Cultural Minister's Council, Building a Creative Innovation Economy, Cultural Ministers Council, February 2008

## **Aim**

The aim of the strategy is to increase the amount of Australian arts content being created, promoted, distributed, accessed, enjoyed and preserved on digital platforms.

## **Objectives**

The strategy is underpinned by four key objectives:

- Increase access to Australian arts content.
- Explore applications of arts practice and content in the broader digital content industry.
- Build digital business capacities and encourage innovation within the sector.
- Support production and preservation of arts content in the digital era.

The Australia Council seeks to offer Australian arts content producers across metropolitan, regional and remote communities; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities, equal opportunities to connect with audiences using the new art practice and content distribution channels afforded by digital technology.

## **Components**

The strategy comprises four streams:

- **New audiences:** *promoting access to arts content*
- **New domains:** *evolving arts content and practice*
- **New incomes:** *linking arts content and commerce*
- **New support:** *producing and preserving arts content*

## New audiences: promoting access to arts content

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Opera was once performed exclusively for court audiences. However, it did not take long before the idea of performing opera for a public audience, supported by the sale of tickets, emerged. In Venice in 1637, the opera 'season' was born.

Of course, this kind of innovation in expanding audiences for the arts did not start and finish with opera.

The majority of Australians are already, or will soon be, connected to high-speed broadband and DTV. Artists can use these technologies to reach new audiences, retain or deepen connections with existing audiences, and allow audiences to share arts content with each other. Self-publishing via websites; peer-to-peer technology; distribution deals with social networking sites; and more traditional distribution via DTV networks, online media publishers and mobile carriers are just some of the ways artists can achieve these outcomes.

In recent years the Australia Council has supported artists to distribute traditional and new forms of arts content via digital means, online virtual worlds, mobile technology and DTV<sup>4</sup>. The *Arts content for the digital era strategy* is a framework for deepening and extending this support in order to match the growing needs of artists to engage with digital technology and the increasing range of opportunities which the digital era offers.

*For decades the public broadcasters have provided one of the most potent means by which art in Australia is experienced.*<sup>5</sup>

Australian national broadcasters, particularly the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Specialist Broadcasting Service (SBS), are innovators in adopting digital platforms well beyond standard broadcasting. Both the ABC and SBS have developed digital distribution mechanisms over the Internet, game applications, Global Positioning System (GPS) applications and mobile phones.

Measures announced in the 2009-10 Budget will enable both broadcasters to provide more Australian content. The measures will also specifically support the ABC to deliver a dedicated digital children's television channel and enhanced Regional Broadband Hubs including portals and virtual town squares that will "encourage and assist the development of user generated content and create online avenues for local communities to connect and collaborate".<sup>6</sup> In this context, there may be significant opportunities to increase the amount of arts content delivered by the two broadcasters and provide opportunities for artists to reach wider audiences.

In 2008, the Australia Council entered into a strategic partnership with the ABC to deliver more arts content across the ABC's digital delivery platforms. This partnership is a cornerstone of the *Arts content for the digital era strategy*, which will expand in the coming years to include distribution of content across the breadth of arts genres and practice and to enhance the technical skills of artists, equipping them to make work suitable for digital distribution.

Australia's national broadcasters exist within an expanding arena of digital publishing and

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<sup>4</sup> *Trope, Thursday's Fictions and Babelswarm* in Second Life, Mobile Journeys and ABC2 Live

<sup>5</sup> Australia Council submission to the review of the national broadcasters, 2008

<sup>6</sup> "Budget 2009: More Australian stories from ABC and SBS", <http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media>

distribution opportunities. Beyond the TV, screens of all sizes deliver content to tourists on planes, commuters on trains and children in car backseats. In 2008, as part of the partnership with ABC TV, live opera and ballet performances were beamed into regional digital cinemas and onto outdoor public screens.

Access to arts content on digital screens doesn't stop at live performance. Screens also provide a vehicle for artforms traditionally enjoyed in print or in galleries to reach new audiences. In 2008 the Australia Council was also a major sponsor of *Urban Screens Melbourne 08*, a conference and multimedia program which explored the changing relations between urban screens, culture and cities. The Australia Council also supported a live literature remixing event at the 2008 Melbourne Writers Festival as part of international project Remix My Lit.<sup>7</sup>

## **Actions**

The Australia Council will continue to support arts organisations and artists to build and access new audiences by:

- Collaborating with the national broadcasters, the broader media industry and industry bodies to better measure the consumption of and demand for arts content on digital platforms, and facilitate arts sector access to that data.
- Continuing our partnership with the ABC and building new partnerships with the national broadcasters and commercial content distributors including TV, online, mobile and public screens.
- Supporting digital projects that increase opportunities for audiences, particularly young people and those limited by geography and price, to access the work of Australia's major performing arts companies.

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<sup>7</sup> Remix My Lit, <http://www.remixmylit.com>

## New domains: evolving arts content and practice

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The spread of advanced digital infrastructure such as high-speed Internet access and the pervasiveness of mobile phones have provided new dimensions to how audiences can, and want to, interact with art. New infrastructure and technology invariably produces new patrons with new habits. In the digital environment these new habits have proved to be catalysts for the growth of unique forms of practice and content.

Audiences today have a strong desire to understand the art practice behind the content. This phenomena can be seen in the popularity of TV franchises such as *So you think you can dance*, where viewers enjoy the chance to go behind the scenes, watch rehearsals and learn more about the artform and the artists. Coupled with this heightened interest in the practice is a growing engagement with the content.

Digital technology also makes it easier for audiences to engage with content. Online feedback can be provided from anywhere in the world at any time. Dedicated online communities and multi-player role-playing games based on arts content are being created by audiences themselves.<sup>8</sup> Audience participation is also giving rise to whole new artforms such as *Machinima*.

The shift towards interactive media that offer the audience greater agency and option to create 'user-generated' content is no passing fad. Currently, 68% of Australians play computer and console games. In households with game devices, 70% of parents play computer and video games and 80% of these parents play them with their children.<sup>9</sup>

The rise of interactive content forms, coupled with a new artist-audience dynamic, is challenging for many artists. Some perceive it as a threat to the survival of traditional art practices. Others are more concerned by the time-consuming and often legally complex nature of maintaining active interaction with audiences, particular with younger audiences where stricter protocols apply.

Alongside these challenges, new opportunities exist for artists to push their practice into new domains and to engage audience in new ways. The high take-up of gaming devices and mobile phones could ultimately encourage greater participation with arts content – both digital and traditional, at home as well as in the theatre, gallery or concert hall.

The Australia Council recognises that artists and arts companies wishing to engage in new forms must learn how to write, design, create, rehearse and perform in new ways and to be willing to explore the benefits of letting their audiences in on the action in a safe and appropriate manner.

Artists require support to develop new skills and new collaborations outside the arts with technical and interactive production specialists. Artists need training to take advantage of the potential for engaging audiences that is offered by games and other interactive media and to contribute to the growth and development of the industry.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, A., *Youth Online*, University of Sydney

<sup>9</sup> Interactive Australia 2009, Interactive Entertainment Association of Australia

<sup>10</sup> Australian Government, "Creative Australia," Background paper to the 2020 Summit

In recent years the Australia Council has helped artists to push their creativity into new domains both through its regular arts funding program, as well as through special initiatives such as 'Story of the future', which supported artists to create digital narrative projects including games, social networks and educational virtual spaces.

Other initiatives have included inter-disciplinary projects such as a Second Life Artists' Residency which offered teams the opportunity to develop and exhibit new work for this medium and support for young and emerging artists to develop projects using new technologies to engage artists and audiences. The Australia Council has also supported external initiatives including the Mobile Enterprise Growth Alliance (MEGA), which included a series of workshops and development support for creative, business and technical teams developing arts content projects for mobile platforms.

## **Actions**

The Australia Council will continue with targeted initiatives that skill up artists to create work in new domains and support research and development through:

- Continuing to fund works created on and for digital platforms across the breadth of artforms supported by the Australia Council. Support through the annual arts funding program includes funding to develop digital skills, take up digital residencies and create new work in digital domains.
- Extending 'Story of the future', a program of seminars, workshops and research and development (R&D) projects that helps artists learn about and experiment with new art forms and platforms in the digital era. The expanded program will include a focus on live performance as well as literature.
- Initiating strategic R&D projects to map and conceptualise new domains of artistic practice and content within key digital content growth areas. Projects include:
  - a collaborative research project looking at the potential role of artists in the games creative cycle with the Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation (Queensland University of Technology), the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and a range of games industry stakeholders
  - support for MEGA to help artists create and commercialise arts content for mobile platforms and to learn mobile industry skills and knowledge
  - collaboration with national research organisation NICTA to test applications of arts content on mobile and other emerging platforms
  - collaboration with education stakeholders to trial applications of digital arts content in education
  - support for interdisciplinary initiatives that encourage artists to experiment with new forms of practice and content in virtual worlds and other mediums
- Supporting 'Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere', a major research project into the use of public spaces and screens, including for encouraging audience interacting with digital arts content.

## **New incomes: linking arts content and commerce**

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Artists and arts companies have traditionally derived income from the one-off nature of their work, be it a sculpture, a live performance or a festival appearance.

The huge innovation of digital technology is the ability to copy and distribute content more cheaply, rapidly and widely than ever before, which of course runs entirely contrary to the 'one-off' model.

Digital content is also dynamic. Unlike books and live performances, which are presented to audiences only when finished, digital arts content wants to evolve and it is harder to lock it off because it can be sliced, remixed and mashed-up. In essence, digital content is designed to be reproduced and repurposed, not protected.

Another distinguishing characteristic of digital content is that audiences often expect it to be free. And further complicating the equation is the sheer volume of digital content that competes for our attention.

The Australia Council recognises the challenges these new parameters present, but firmly believes that digital content business, copyright, marketing and distribution models can work to the benefit of artists and the sector.

While audiences may expect digital arts content to be free, this does not mean that artists should not get paid. But it does demand that artists revisit existing business models to figure out just who will pay them. Through the centuries, the arts has benefited from many 'free for the audience' models of support – from wealthy patrons and philanthropists to festival sponsors and media advertising. The digital era perhaps only ushers a new iteration of this kind of model.

The Australia Council understands that digitising content alone is not a recipe for success. That content must be appropriate for the new platform, i.e. online or mobile. Artists must also ensure their arts content is marketed correctly via the right channels, which in the digital era can be as much about building relationships with potential audiences through social networks and online communities as through more traditional media advertising.

Artists would also do well to recognise that they are competing in a global marketplace and seek out opportunities to market and promote their work overseas. Arts content producers must revisit how they do business and strive to offer simple, quality ebusiness and ecommerce experiences to consumers.<sup>11</sup> Finally, it is also vital that artists seek opportunities to commercialise content where appropriate.<sup>12</sup> This move may require finding partners with expertise in market research, sourcing investment and negotiating complex business relationships.

The Australia Council seeks to encourage the sector to test new copyright and business models and be open to licensing content for reuse where appropriate. It will also be important for the sector to pursue opportunities to commercialise their intellectual property (IP) and approach their business practice with the same innovation as they do their arts practice.

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<sup>11</sup> Digital Economy Future Directions Consultation Paper, Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, December 2008

<sup>12</sup> Building a Creative Innovation Economy, Cultural Ministers Council, February 2008

The Australia Council is already active in these areas with investments in research, training and digital infrastructure projects and support for commercialisation.

The Australia Council has recently supported research on the impact of digital technology on the music, literature and major performing arts sectors, as well as seminars and training on digital publishing.

Further to this, support for ecommerce initiatives such as the Australian Music Centre portal and the Australian Script Centre's ecommerce website for viewing and purchasing production rights have been provided as well as information on marketing, distribution and business models in *The writer's guide to making a digital living*.<sup>13</sup>

## **Actions**

The *Arts content for the digital era strategy* will continue to build the capacity of the sector to adopt new arts content business and distribution models, and to generate new income streams through ebusiness by:

- Encouraging 'digital' professional development through profiling digital career pathways for artists and producing further resources, such as *The writer's guide to making a digital living*, that focus on the production, marketing and distribution of arts content for a variety of artforms.
- Connecting artists and organisations to commercialisation, investment, mentoring and support.
- Ensuring business development programs delivered or facilitated by the Australia Council include information on digital business models; digital marketing strategies to reach audiences locally and internationally; and copyright and protocols in a changing digital environment.
- Continuing to support Australian publishers to identify and adopt best-practice digital publishing strategies for arts content.

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<sup>13</sup> All research and publications available at <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research>

## **New support: producing and preserving arts content**

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The Digital Content Industry Action Agenda report and subsequent reviews identified 'rectifying disadvantage created by the historically-based analogue/digital distinction' as a key issue of concern.<sup>14</sup> The disadvantage referred to arises when individuals or organisations seek support, such as funding, training or collaborations, to produce content that is primarily in digital form or in both digital and another form.

In the arts sector many funding and education programs and professional organisations remain divided along traditional lines such as literature, visual arts and performing arts. While artists learn to move seamlessly between artforms and to work with new technology and business partners, support for digital or interactive content is often only available through entirely separate channels.

Often support programs are set aside as experimental or new, or only for artists with a background in the 'first screen industries', film and TV.

The reality is that those producing digital and cross-platform content are often writers, performers, visual artists and musicians. Their work in the digital domain is merely another facet of their art practice or an extension of their art content.

As digital infrastructures and devices like the iPhone stimulate demand for cross-platform content, the Australia Council recognises that artists will need greater access to appropriate support to help them learn new skills and build new collaborators with the broader screen and creative industries.

Alongside changes to the production of arts content in the digital era come changes in its preservation. Digital archives and collections are another priority area for the arts and cultural sector. The Collections Council of Australia recently published a national framework and action plan<sup>15</sup> to advance the digital collecting activities of Australian institutions. Locally and internationally, there is a growing awareness that access to appropriately licensed digital archives and collections is essential to stimulating the creation of and engagement with digital content.

Museums and galleries and the national broadcasters hold most of the nation's digital archives. Australian artists and organisations are now seeking to create their own digital archives both for preservation purposes and as assets for their businesses. Whether 'made digital' (a live performance recorded for download) or 'born digital' (a new media installation) arts content can be a rich and diverse resource for audiences and for other artists and content creators.

While digital preservation and clearing copyrights for further uses remains a complex business, 'recognising digital content as a general purpose technology for the 21st century'<sup>16</sup> could open new opportunities for audiences to engage with arts content. It could also extend the longevity and even the income-earning potential of their content.

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<sup>14</sup> Unlocking the Potential: Summary, DCITA, April 2006

<sup>15</sup> Australian Framework and Action Plan for Digital Heritage Collections v0.C3, Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2007

<sup>16</sup> Unlocking the Potential: Summary, DCITA, April 2006

Since 2006, the Australia Council has informally piloted 'new support' to help artists to produce arts content in a changing environment.

The Australia Council has worked with the Australian Film, Television and Radio School; Screen Tasmania and the Games Developers Association of Australia (GDAA); MEGA; and the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA) to deliver seminars, workshops and labs and to attract screen and mobile industry executives to project pitching and networking events.

### **Actions**

The Australia Council will continue to explore 'new support' for the production and support the preservation of arts content and access to digital archives by:

- Encouraging collaboration between arts professionals and management with the broader digital content industry.
- Running professional development and networking events with screen industry partners and state and federal screen funding agencies.
- Supporting R&D projects to develop and test digital archiving standards and solutions for a range of arts content, such as publications and live performances.

### **Conclusion**

The above strategy targets four key areas which are having the greatest impact on the creation, distribution, promotion, preservation and enjoyment of arts content in the digital era. We anticipate the sector will continue to witness significant changes as a result of emerging digital technologies and their impact on audience behaviour in the coming years. We see this strategy as an evolving framework within which we can continue to respond to new changes as they arise and provide leadership and support to the sector.

### **Further information**

Information on existing and future initiatives mentioned in this strategy can be accessed via our website and through the relevant artform board or section. We welcome your thoughts and feedback.

For further information or to provide feedback please contact the Digital Strategy Project Manager, Therese Fingleton at [t.fingleton@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:t.fingleton@australiacouncil.gov.au) or on 02 9215 9050.

## Glossary

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**Cross-platform content** - content that is expressed across a combination of different media platforms.

**Digital content** – content (text, images, video) provided through a digital consumption device. Digital content may start life as non-digital but is digitised for delivery to the end user.

**Digital era / environment** – the current environment media environment, which in the past decade has witnessed a large shift from analogue to digital production, broadcasting and publishing methods.

**Digital platforms** – platforms used to create, publish or distribute digital content, such online, on mobile devices such as mobile phones, games consoles.

**Ebusiness** – a business run via the internet.

**Ecommerce** – commerce transacted via the internet.

**Fan fiction** – fiction written by fans of a popular TV show or other work, involving characters and settings from that work, and often published on the internet or in a fan magazine, also known as fanfic.

**First screen industries** – film and television industries which developed prior to the digital screen industries (video games, mobile, personal computer)

**Global Positioning System (GPS)** – a global navigation satellite system that uses a constellation of satellites that allow GPS receivers to determine their current location and time.

**Intellectual Property (IP)** – the rights of creative workers in literary, artistic, industrial and scientific fields which can be protected either by copyright or trademarks, patents, etc.

**Machinima** – Cinema or film shot inside computer games and virtual worlds.

**Peer-to-peer** - a communication structure in which individuals interact directly, without going through a centralized system or hierarchy.

**Remixing** – creating an alternative version of a piece of content, such as music, literature or film, which is different from the original version.

**Social networking sites** – websites such as MySpace or Facebook where a group of friends or acquaintances with similar interests can share conversations, information, etc.

**Traditional content** – also known as Legacy media or heritage media this is content which is developed for consumption through a linear or non-interactive form such as TV, film or publication (book, magazine or newspaper). Legacy content might be created digitally (written on a computer, filmed using digital film), but the consumption is assumed to be through a non-digital device.

**Traditional distribution** – methods traditionally most commonly used to distribute content, e.g. literature through publishing houses, book distributors, books shops and print media, music through music publishers, CD distributors and music shops.

**User-generated content** – various kinds of media content, publicly available, that are produced by end users (i.e. the person who uses a product).