Mobilizing User-Generated Content for Canada’s Digital Content Advantage


The Project
- To examine user-generated content (UGC) in its current state, the state of knowledge related to UGC and identify gaps where additional research could create Canada’s digital content advantage.
- Seek to reach goals by asking the same questions in three domains of UGC:
  * define UGC in its current state
  * identify successful models built for UGC
  * identify and anticipate barriers to further development and use UGC
  * anticipate the policy infrastructure needed to sustain a model to leverage further development of UGC to Canada’s advantage

Current State of UGC
- Successful sites integrate content creation, aggregation, distribution and consumption into a single tool.
- A recurring theme throughout the literature on creative content is the erosion of the traditional dichotomies between traditional creators and end-users – typical users are now more able than ever to produce creative content in a transformative way.
- User-generated content sites with unobtrusive marketing and no required fees are more attractive to users.
- Many elements of UGC present in games available today in user interface customizations or game conversion modifications.
- Modifications can act as sociotechnical objects, managing gameplay, providing incentive, enabling play, or can incite frustration.
- Modders/UGC creators may spend countless hours and effort on their mods; will support each other through websites and forums.
- Mods can aid in increasing the longevity and appeal of a game, as well as customer loyalty.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
- Conduct further research on the motivations behind UGC (and do so without hampering the energy and enthusiasm of end users) – searching for effective balancing mechanisms is crucial.

Creative Content
- UGC generated by individuals or small non-regulated groups.
- May be created, developed, captured and put on display by a individual on an online platform.
- Found on portals such as YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, & Facebook.

Small-Scale Tools
- Tools, modifications, & applications that have been created by a user or group of users.
- Game modifications/add-ons created by users/players to modify the game or assist in gameplay or virtual worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft, Second Life).
- Applications or tools created for mobile devices (such as the iPhone or Android).

Collaborative
- UGC authored collectively and shared by a self-regulating group of contributors.
- OSS includes both open-source software and free/libre software.
- Wikis such as Wikipedia.
- Government data sets can be provided by any level of government.

Barriers
- Closed proprietary platforms.
- Privacy and security issues.
- Copyright uncertainties.
- Access to bandwidth/infrastructures (“digital divide” concerns).
- Software/Hardware skills.
- Costs to accessing platforms.
- Lack of value or incentive (social, emotional, monetary).
- The digital divide.
- Broadband Internet access.
- Appropriate hardware/software for development.
- Computer/programming skills.
- Costs to accessing a game/virtual world.
- SDK costs.
- Policies preventing or limiting the creation of small scale tools.
- Restrictive intellectual property rights (mostly copyright but now also potentially business method patents).
- Crown Copyright in the case of government data.
- Restrictive End User Licensing Agreements - EULAs (often pointing to US law).
- TPMs/DRM (and the proposed anti-circumvention rules).
- Liability worries.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
- Conduct further research on the policy and technological infrastructures needed to mobilize and leverage UGC in Canada.
- Conduct further research on the motivations behind UGC and the qualities of popular/viral UGC.
- Examine avenues for effective commercialization and monetization, to gain the value generated by UGC (and do so without hampering the energy and enthusiasm of end users) – searching for effective balancing mechanisms is crucial.

By enabling its populace, Canada will not only create a vibrant and innovative UGC sector, but also facilitate greater cultural expression and economic growth.