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**Six billion
monkeys versus
William Shakespeare**

The **Yellow** Papers Series

The Infinite Monkey Theorem states that, given an infinite amount of time (and bananas), a monkey hitting keys at random on a typewriter keyboard will almost surely eventually type every book in France's Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In the restatement of the theorem most popular among English speakers, the monkeys eventually type out the collected works of William Shakespeare.

As few of us have got until infinity to prove the theory, maybe we should give the monkeys a helping hand. Let's switch all those typewriters with brand spanking new Macbook Pros, replace monkeys with people and connect them to each other across the internet. Obviously there will still be a lot of dross created, but every now and again a work of genius will emerge. As groups begin to collaborate with one another across social networks, leave signposts for one another through bookmarks or tags and distribute their work efficiently through peer-to-peer software, they might even start to get quite a lot done.

The remarkable success of *YouTube* is an excellent example of user-generated entertainment that (whilst not Shakespeare), is reportedly streaming 30 million videos a day. The site offers unlimited storage space for your videos. Of course, many detractors of user-generated content argue that the majority of videos on *YouTube* are of particularly low quality (those pesky monkeys).

Aside from the fact that much of the lower quality footage is no worse than the space-filling programming of non-primetime cable TV, there are signs that the quality of this online content maybe about to rise quite considerably.

Newer competitors to *YouTube* are incorporating revenue share business models, to incentivise the volume and (more importantly) the creative quality of video uploads. For example, Rewver gives the person who submits the video a 50% share in the revenue generated by advertising. Each video has an ad tagged to the end of it. If a viewer clicks on it, the video generates ad revenue. This works even if you email the video to someone else, or put it up on another site such as *YouTube* or *del.icio.us*. In fact a site that posts or links to your video will get 20% of the income, and the rest is split equally between you and Rewver.



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These new revenue models hint at a future where creative artists aspire to make money from advertising. In effect revenue-sharing video sites could become the end and not the means, with opportunities for a music artist to make as much money from advertising as from being signed to a label. Now the monkeys are getting paid!

People are also making money from citizen journalism, another form of user-generated content. With an average of 700,000 visitors a day, the popularity of *OhMyNews* in Korea is still on the rise. The entirely user generated news service has a 'tip jar', so that readers can pledge money to the best stories. One particular story netted £20,000 in just under a week for one contributing citizen journalist. Is it any wonder that the quality of writing for such sites continues to increase and correspondingly attract more readers (and contributors)?

It would seem 'media' by its own definition is slowly disappearing. There is becoming less and less need for an intermediary between the content providers and the content consumers. In fact they are quickly becoming one and the same thing, with the content itself being distributed among these social networks seamlessly and collaboratively.

People are now doing much more than simply spreading word of mouth or passing on a viral email. Now, collaborative peer to peer software has proven beyond doubt to be the most efficient way of distributing file based content such as music and films. *BitTorrent* software (amazingly responsible for 35% of all internet traffic) is an excellent example. Paradoxically, it actually works faster the more people that use it. This is because the software cleverly downloads small parts of the file from whoever else owns that file. Whilst the music and film industries have by and large tried to ignore the technology, there are signs of change.

In the last month *Warner Brothers* have announced a that it will make hundreds of movies and television shows available for purchase over the Internet using BitTorrent software, according to the president of *Warner Brothers Home Entertainment Group*, Kevin Tsujihara, "If we can convert 5, 10 or 15 percent of the illegal downloaders into consumers of our product, that is significant."

So if people are becoming the new media, what is the opportunity for brands? Last year in these same pages I talked about co-creation and the need for brands to embrace participation from consumers. Much has since been written on the subject in the past 12 months. There have also been several good examples of brands putting it into action. However, what is becoming really interesting is the extent to which this creativity is happening outside of traditional media channels. In fact many co-created experiences are not even taking place within branded environments.

Now the monkeys are getting paid!

Yes, unfortunately to take advantage of people as content creators, media owners and distributors, brands need to learn to let their assets go. Social networks provide a fertile breeding ground for collaborative creativity. However, you can't just wade in there and say 'who wants to have fun?!'. Myspace users are looking for content to place in their pages to make them look good and to attract visitors (and friends). Most of these users are now quite adept at turning their hand to a bit of HTML to make their sites look frighteningly garish. They are even adding videos, music and animation to their pages. Another case of people expressing themselves through the media they consume. What would it take to get these guys to put your brand into their Myspace pages?

Perhaps one answer lies with companies like MSN who are encouraging brands to break up their websites into discrete chunks of content that can be moved to other places on the internet, its not hard to see where this is going. MSN call them gadgets or (as Apple users would say) widgets. It makes sense for brands and for the people that love these brands too. Imagine if you could grab a small interactive experience from a brand you love and put it in your Myspace pages for others to experience? It might not be too dissimilar in experience to the recent Google tie-up with The Da Vinci Code. MSN believe that brands will be excited by being able to share these gadgets within a social space or within the functionality of Instant Messenger (so your buddy list can experience the gadget without needing to 'sign in').

Think of these gadgets like the free toy you take away after visiting McDonald's for a Happy Meal. I predict brands will be making lots of these mini interactive experiences, each with varying shelf lives. Of course where traditional brands and media go, users will already be there (or close behind). With email already beginning to feel like a tired old media (when compared to newer communication technologies), what odds for user-generated gadgets received through social networks replacing viral content via emails over the next 5 years?

**Pass me a banana.
I'm off to see how far
the chimps have got to.**

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