



Canadian Content in a Digital World

Topline Summary Vancouver

September 26th 2016

Event Details

This is a flash summary of key themes and discussions emerging from the Canadian Content in a Digital World Roundtable session held in Vancouver on September 26th, 2016 at the Roundhouse Arts and Community Centre.

The session consisted of a half-day discussion in which participants were invited to provide their views and perspectives on three broad questions related to the ongoing Canadian Content in a Digital World consultation namely:

- What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?
 - How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?
 - How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in the digital world, and how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?
- The session was facilitated by Phillippe-Antoine Lupien and each at table discussion was led by an Ipsos facilitator.
 - A total of **39** individuals participated in the discussion. All roundtable participants were identified by PCH and recruiting was a combined effort between the Department and Ipsos.
 - A list of participants for the event is available online at www.canadiancontentconsultations.ca
 - The Minister of Canadian Heritage as well as PCH Policy representatives were on hand to listen to feedback first-hand and provide additional context as needed.

Key Takeaways

- In the digital age, citizen choice is inherent, the focus should be on investing in creating innovative and competitive cultural content.
- Significant changes to how we fund arts and culture in Canada need to be made to foster innovation, promote equity across regions and sectors and to broaden access to more and new types of creators.
- Invest in the development of creators through training, education, and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship in the sector.
- Maintaining IP in Canada is essential to fair remuneration for creators and for ensuring Canadian control of creative development.
- Educate and raise awareness among Canadians of the richness, diversity and economic benefits of the cultural sector in Canada to foster support for investing in the sector and generate local demand for Canadian content.
- There was no consensus between participants on the definition of Canadian content. Many felt that a better definition for who qualifies as a *Canadian creator* and what constitutes *Canadian content* is needed to allow for them to be truly protected and supported.
- Canadian culture is important to a stronger democracy. Reflecting Canadian stories and our national identity in our cultural content is integral.

Summary of Key Themes

What does a cultural system that supports creators and respects citizen choice look like to you?

There was general agreement that a balance between supporting creators and offering choice to Canadians must be struck. To support our creators, the government must play a role in ensuring the right supports for creators to create and should play a role in ensuring that all Canadians have access to that content. However, there was recognition that the advent of the digital age means that citizens are given access to unlimited choice through global digital platforms and therefore, there are few levers available to control the amount of Canadian content that is presented to Canadians.

In this digital context, where, provided they have access to the Internet, Canadians are afforded unlimited choice, most agreed that the emphasis should first be on supporting Canadian creators in developing content that can compete in the increasingly diverse and competitive digital space. However, many cautioned that too much focus on digital content could leave offline content behind and that special attention should be paid to supporting these creators in their sectors either through tailored supports or through assisting them in the transition to digital.

Supporting Creators

Most agreed that supporting creators requires better access to funding.

- There was significant discussion of changing the funding model in the cultural sector from a subsidy based approach to the development of an independent financially viable market. Common suggestions for achieving this included:
 - Streamline the process to make it easier for creators to navigate.
 - Make the criteria for awarding funding more flexible – there was a prevailing view that current criteria are too narrow in scope, forcing creators to develop content that meets prescribed criteria to gain access to funding. This is seen as limiting the creative potential of the sector with too much focus on a financially successful end product rather than striking a balance between profitability and creativity. This flexibility also extends to funding mechanisms that allow and support cross-pollination between the different cultural industries.
 - Decentralize funding to provide more regional equity across the country, enabling better access to creators that work outside major urban centers and allow access for more local and regional creators.
 - Others stressed the importance of mid-career opportunities, describing how many emerging artists receive funding to help them get started but then lose momentum, that a transitional upscale needs to occur to encourage a sustainable market for these creators.
- Others felt that perhaps casting a wider net and allowing for more risk-taking as opposed to proven financially viable content would better benefit the Canadian cultural sector. This would lead to further developing Canadian creators experience, a greater diversity of voices and more freedom for creative expression beyond proven financially motivate pieces.

In addition to funding, there was significant discussion on investing in the development of creators.

- Several suggestions of how governments could support the development of a sustainable and financially independent cultural workforce in Canada were made. Key recommendations included:
 - Encouraging young people to pursue a career in arts and culture and fostering the development of a sustainable career path for the sector.
 - Support maintaining Canadian IP in Canada and in the hands of creators.
 - Allowing our creators, the time and resources to explore their art or creation, to develop a final product or piece that explores their idea and expresses their story. This is true of film, music, literature, visual arts, and even app and game development. Creators need to be given time to explore their chosen craft, to make attempts and improve.
 - Offer training in business and entrepreneurship to creators so that they can become financially independent and sustainable.

There was general agreement that fostering a culture of valuing Canadian content through raising awareness and educating Canadians is key to supporting Canadian creators.

- A culture of valuing Canadian stories and story-tellers was a primary goal or desire of many of the participants. Citizens should be encouraged to seek out Canadian content and stories.
- There was some discussion of improving the understanding of the average citizen of what is involved in the creation process, the time and investment required. Stories and ideas need funding, hard work and support in order to come to life which is sometimes forgotten in the current digital model, where for some audiences, free access to content is assumed.
- One idea was reiterated throughout the discussion by many participants, that a key value and strength of Canadian content is the diversity of voices, both as reflection of our diversity and a celebration of our differences. Some feel that this unique trait is under threat that the cultural influences from Canada's closest neighbour the United States, and a myriad of other media sources is challenging Canada's own cultural identity.

Citizen Choice

In the context of digital content, choice is unlimited and inherent in universal access to the Internet. The key is how Canada leverages digital platforms to promote and distribute Canadian content.

- Some argued that Canada should develop its own Canadian digital platform to promote homegrown content in competition with existing platforms. Others argued that Canada needs to develop a strategy to be more competitive on existing platforms (e.g. Netflix) and better utilize existing local platforms.
- Discoverability was a key issue in this discussion. Many felt that while they are good at delivering content that audiences know they want and need, it is more difficult to promote discovery of new content beyond this "safety" area of what is known. Discovery is an important part of the citizen experience in consuming cultural content, and while the digital age is in some ways making access and finding different content easier, it is also making it easier to ignore content that might challenge viewers/citizens.

While some felt that all creation should take a digital first approach, many acknowledged that other mediums are still as important, such as theatre, photography and other "offline" mediums not easily shared in the digital space.

- Some stressed that investment in digital content also involves investment in traditional mediums and encouraging overall cultural exploration to promote a culture of cultural consumers. Not all art forms can necessarily take a digital first approach and traditional mediums such as dance, theatre and other performing arts require different supports from mediums that are more digitally native.

How can we meet the challenge of promoting Canada's creativity in the digital world, and how can we use Canadian content to promote a strong democracy?

Promoting Canada's creativity was explored in the previous discussion. As such, most participants spent this time talking about the need to better define what constitutes Canadian content and who qualifies as a Canadian creator. Having a clear understanding of these two concepts was seen as an essential first step to defining a strategy for promoting them. In terms of promoting democracy, participants saw an important role for cultural content to play in defining our national identity.

Promoting Canada's Creativity in a Digital World

There was general agreement that before discussing how Canadian content should be promoted, it was essential to define what is and what is not Canadian content.

There was no consensus on how to define Canadian content or what constitutes a Canadian creator.

- For some, content is Canadian provided it is created, at least in part, by Canadian creators, regardless of whether the content itself tells a Canadian story. For others, to truly be Canadian content, it must express a uniquely Canadian perspective.
- Diversity and equality of voices was another key element to Canadian content. Some indicated that while in the past Canadian content laws and regulations as well as attitude has been a protective measure against the United States, it should instead become a point of pride.

Using Canadian Content to Promote a Strong Democracy

A diversity of voices and stories was indicated by a majority of participants to being the key to promoting democracy.

- Diversity and inclusion in terms of region, gender, colour, inclusion of the LGBTQ community, of immigrant communities and diversity of opinion are each important to informing Canadians about each other and different aspects of local, regional, national and international events. Some felt that this could be achieved through stronger national institutions. It is important to note that diversity needs to be seen as organic and authentic, coming from those communities and not diversity for the sake of diversity.
- Social responsibility in Canada, having a voice as a country, and placing importance on not only the news culture but the entire cultural industry in promoting that voice was important to a number of participants. Some felt that this will assist in developing a cohesive Canadian identity that serves to bring Canadians together and act as an invitation to all Canadians to care about Canada as a country.
- In order for information regarding democratic and public policy to be shared, all Canadians need access to the Internet and other tools to access this information.
- Funding for news and information streams was a key concern. There was some general discussion concerning the media's lack of resources to cover Canadian and local content but that it is still important to share local and regional identities and information. While similar to other cultural industries, some felt that the news agencies could no longer rely on the market to fund it.

How do we support Canada's artists, content creators and cultural entrepreneurs in order to create a cultural ecosystem in which they thrive and that will benefit the growth of our middle class at home, and help them reach beyond our borders?

Most participants agreed that Canada positioning itself as a global leader in cultural and digital content is essential to supporting a thriving cultural ecosystem at home, capable of benefiting the growth of the middle class. Promoting Canadian culture abroad will require bolstering its image at home and the development of a clear cultural export strategy that is aligned with Canada's industrial and innovation strategies. Canada needs to be a part of the global conversation on culture.

Creating a Thriving Cultural Ecosystem that Benefits the Growth of the Middle Class

Most agreed that a thriving cultural ecosystem that benefits the growth of the middle class requires that Canada position itself as a global leader in cultural and digital content.

- Many participants already see Canada as a cultural and digital content leader, while others saw the potential for Canada to expand in this area. Canada's competitive advantages were identified by participants as the diversity of our voices and ability to tailor ourselves to niche markets within the international community.
- Some identified Canadian culture and innovation as being an example already used around the world, while others felt that we could continue to learn from other models for investment to further our position as a leader in this area. One participant expressed the positioning of Canada as a cultural leader to serve two purposes, a tangible economic purpose and an intangible entertainment and expressive purpose.
- Canada's cultural institutions were seen as one piece of the overall system. While many felt it important to strengthen these institutions and/or their Canadian content regulations, a few questioned the infrastructure in place to support creators in reaching them. Some felt that the interaction between and structure of Canada's national institutions needs to be revisited, similar to the Royal Commissions of the mid-1900s.

Reaching Beyond our Borders

- While many like the idea of promoting Canadian content, values and identity internationally, some felt that there is a stronger need to focus domestically before being concerned with international audiences. They felt that by capturing a Canadian audience with quality and building pride in Canadian content that global promotion would be much easier. Many discussed how Canadian creators often go unnoticed here but are powerhouses internationally – more needs to be done domestically to celebrate our successes on the global stage. There was a perception that these creators often receive recognition in Canada only once they have received acclaim abroad.

- Others felt that a new playbook to facilitate export was needed to acknowledge promoting content both physically and virtually in other markets. Some suggestions received included inviting innovation and communities of international experts to participate in the Canadian discussion to expand influence, participate in a global conversation. Another resource mentioned that would assist in global promotion is access to market and online traffic statistics that would assist creators in identifying niche audiences interested in their materials and subsequently facilitate access to these audiences.