



## Rich media overload

### Description

We are all filmmakers now, thanks to smartphones that record HD video, and editors such as Apple's iMovie for cropping, combining and processing videos while out in the field. The short video below was recorded in the space of about ten minutes, edited while on a train journey, then uploaded to Vimeo when I returned to the hotel's wifi service - all on an iPhone. For the visually inclined, making videos is a great way to pass the time.

This is the age of rich media, which refers not to the quality of what's produced, but the number of channels it deploys. The infrastructure has to be rich to deliver it. Rich media includes text, photographs, video and audio resources in vast quantity, shared and commented on via social media. At the moment 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, according to the [YouTube stats page](#).

Vimeo has fewer users and seems to cater to a more design-oriented community of producers and consumers. See a comparison at [filmshortage.com](#). Then there's [Vine.com](#) for 6 second looped videos managed by [twitter.com](#). See the end of this post.

### Rich media marketing

Rich media seems to be most at home in marketing. To truly engage with their customers, firms now need to connect with the opportunities provided by multiple media channels: video, audio, gaming, and social media.

According to a paper by Rohm Hanna and colleagues, firms need to dispense with several old-style marketing myths: that brand managers own and manage their brands, mobile phones are for people to talk to one another, the web is for finding information, that companies are in control of the messages they send out to consumers, that consumers buy what producers promote, and that it's too risky to invite customers to talk about their products.

Now marketing is positioned within a rich ecology of media and practices, but the authors still imply that it's the firms that have responsibility for rich media production. I think that with varying degrees of skill, we consumers contribute to the rich media milieu as well.

## Rich media learning

Educators face similar challenges to marketers. Academics are under pressure to deliver online educational material for students to peruse from home, the library, coffee shop or bus before coming into class, procedures amplified further through the requirements of distance study.

Some scholars suggest that students make video recordings of their work experience to relate class-based learning to practical work in the field, i.e. what goes on in a work environment. My colleague John Lee promotes the idea of annotated video recordings of tutorials as a means of learning vicariously.

In keeping with this rich media milieu it seems appropriate to invite and exploit resources created and shared by students and teachers alike. There are challenges however.

## Rich media challenges

1. It seems that people have a short attention span for amateur videos. A one minute video of an emu stealing a sandwich may amuse, and an eighteen minute TED video may inspire, but a recording of an hour long lecture is an endurance test. We seasoned consumers of film and television expect anything of duration to deploy a range of techniques and artistry to keep us engaged.
2. YouTube has presumably engendered sensitivities to a broader range of filmic techniques (the jump cut, shaky camera, speaking direct to camera, time lapse) and subject matter (other people's families, what animals do, crazy dancing, homespun fashion tips, DIY plumbing instructions). Visual languages are changing all the time, and these need to be learnt, assessed critically, and incorporated as necessary.
3. Video competes with writing. Why read a book when you can watch a movie? Why write an essay when you can shoot a video? We face this challenge as we've substituted a video essay for a written, text-based essay in one of our courses. Video requires new and different skills to writing an essay. A writer has to analyse, read, compose and cross reference in ways that an aim-and-shoot amateur video producer may not. Does rich media diminish the skill of writing?
4. Video introduces technical constraints. There are new skills to be learnt, but all that visual material eats up bandwidth. It also has to be stored, kept secure, and indexed for easy access. It's harder to search and skim a video than text, and automated video tagging and search is underdeveloped as yet.
5. Then there are ethical constraints. You can perhaps get away with taking holiday videos that include crowds of people and then publish it instantly online. Taking a video of a meeting, classroom of students, on a ward round, in the lab, the office, a consultation, the construction site, requires considerations of confidentiality, permissions and risks.

## Overload

Rich media also contribute to visual and aural noise, which by a certain reading may in fact dull the senses. Marshall McLuhan thought of television as a **cool** medium. For him, 1960s television had lower definition than film. The television, radio and books are cool as they require an active imagination, which is to say the listener or reader has to do some work. They also incite action. By way of contrast, for McLuhan, film is **hot** as it induces soporific responses (i.e. makes us passive). Little is left to the imagination.

But now video and television are **hot**. The high bandwidth and constant flicker and spectacle of movement and imagery of HD video induces inaction in front of the video display. The action is all on the screen so the viewer doesn't have to do any work.

In this respect the language of video may run counter to the aims of learning, though there's presumably a balance to be negotiated, and the gaming elements also comes into play. In fact *making* a video may turn out to be more engaging than watching one.

## References

- Dalgarno, B Kennedy, G and Merritt, A 2014, "Connecting student learning at university with professional practice using rich media in practice-based curricula" in M. Gosper, and D. Ifenthaler (eds.), *Curriculum Models for the 21st Century: 213 Using Learning Technologies in Higher Education*: 213-233. Springer, New York.
- Hanna, R Rohm, A and Crittenden, VL 2011 "We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem". *Business Horizons*, vol. 54, pp. 265-273.
- Lee, J 2010, "Vicarious learning from tutorial dialogue" in M. Wolpers, P. A. Kirschner, M. Scheffel, S. Lindstaedt, and V. Dimitrova (eds.), *Sustaining TEL: From Innovation to Learning and Practice*: 524-529. Springer, Berlin, Germany.
- McLuhan, M 1994, *Understanding Media, The Extensions of Man*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

## Category

1. Film and media

## Tags

1. engagement
2. film
3. video

## Date Created

January 3, 2015

## Author

rcoyne99