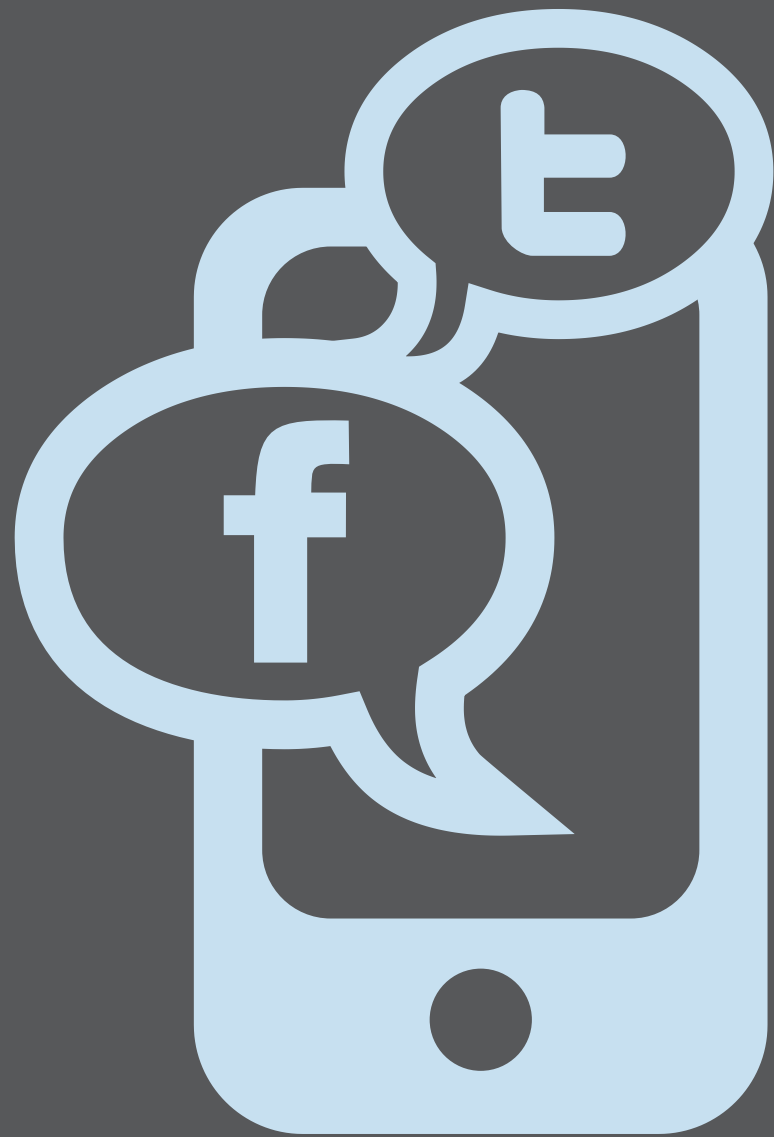


Screen Australia

HOW TO WRITE A TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION BIBLE

A template for multi-platform producers
By GARY P HAYES



INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to provide a useful, best-practice guide to the thinking, planning, documentation and supporting materials required when developing a property across multiple media platforms. It is predominantly aimed at the producers of such projects, who have responsibility for the overall direction of all key areas, and should inform the input they need from their various multi-disciplinary team members.

The bible that this document will guide you towards is not a production bible in the traditional sense – a format document for franchising a TV property into other markets – but rather a catch-all that covers key components of a complex multi-platform service. Your bible may be extended to a full production reference document as the sections it contains become more detailed. Some sections across each 'chapter' may appear to be repetitive but should reflect a different perspective and specialisation on common areas of the project.

The Transmedia Production Bible is primarily a document that captures key story and design IP elements, rules of engagement, functionality and technical issues across multiple platforms, and an overview of the business/marketing plan. Each of the five main sections requires specialist members of the project team to be responsible for its development as the service goes from conception to production and the document becomes a fully detailed production bible.

You don't necessarily need to follow this structure precisely as the final format will depend on the range of content, scope and scale of your proposition – the amount of story, technical complexity, business elements or design thinking, etc. The suggested length of each section is for guidance only, and the included diagrams are intentionally simplistic to encourage your own interpretations.



Template written non-exclusively by Gary P Hayes as a blueprint guide for multi-platform producers. July 2011.



SCREEN
AUSTRALIA

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
TREATMENT	4
Tagline.....	4
Back story and context	4
Synopsis	4
Plot points.....	5
Characterisation and attitude.....	5
Scripts.....	5
User-centric scenarios.....	5
FUNCTIONAL SPECIFICATION	6
Multi-platform form.....	6
Rules of engagement	7
Platforms and channels	7
Service build overview	7
User journey.....	8
Key events	9
Timelines.....	9
Interface and branding.....	9
DESIGN SPECIFICATION	10
Design aesthetic	10
Branding and design guidelines introduction.....	10
Storyboard.....	10
Wireframes.....	11
Style guide, colour and font specs	12
Media design styles	12
Full assets list	12
TECHNOLOGY SPECIFICATION	13
Technology platform vision	13
System architecture	13
Underlying magic in the technology	14
Service build infrastructure	14
Device methodology	14
User management	15
Content management, back-end and server	15
Coding and builds	15
Quality assurance testing	15
BUSINESS & MARKETING	16
Goals	16
Success indicators	17
User need.....	17
Target audience and marketing	17
Business models.....	18
Projections, budgeting and timelines	18
Production team	19
Status and next steps	20
Copyright, IP & licensing.....	20
Summary and calls to action.....	20

01. TREATMENT

This opening chapter introduces the story world driving the multi-platform service. It is a story-centric overview, and will reveal the key narrative and/or service arcs in simple language, making the context of the service clear. The focus should be on describing an engaging story or experience (if the service is more utility or documentary-focused). It should not introduce any explicit design, functional or technical elements. At the end it should introduce a range of user scenarios as routes or journeys through the story world, making simple references to platforms. The treatment should comprise the following sub sections, which are described in more detail below:

- + **Tagline**
- + **Back story and context**
- + **Synopsis**
- + **Plot points**
- + **Characterisation and attitude**
- + **Scripts**
- + **User-centric scenarios**

Tagline

A tagline is a single-line hook that 'teases' the reader about what the service will achieve, or what questions it raises, from an experiential point of view. The best taglines for user-centric services include the user as 'you'; for example, "How will you save planet Orgon from Humans?", "Your journey into the mind & body of a refugee" or "Uncovering the truth behind Australia's biggest secret, and you're the detective."

1 or 2 lines

Back story and context

This will describe the environment in which your service exists. For a story universe, it will cover historical context, preceding narrative and/or the general mythology. Services that have less story elements will talk about it as an experience, including competitor landscapes, consumer markets, and/or technology trends. It will set the foundation and scene for the rest of the treatment section by bringing the reader of the document into the realm of the service. It can be enhanced with one or two scene-setting mood images or actual interfaces to entice the reader.

Approximately 1 page

Synopsis

This is an outline of the 'actual' project or service being produced, describing how the story elements or experience unfold over time. It will clearly define the story environment, as a self-contained world, and concentrate on the narrative threads, introducing key characters or specific functions. As a story-focused subsection, it need only hint at the role of each platform, acting instead as a synopsis for the multi-platform service as a whole. However, it needs to be clear how and why the different platforms work with different aspects of the story or utility. The synopsis doesn't need to be rigid in its chronology, as that will come later.

1-2 pages

Plot points

Most multi-platform projects will play out as a sequence of events as the service evolves over time. To aid understanding by third parties, a numbered list of how the service is launched in phases and sub-elements is very useful. Therefore it is valuable to include a list of key story-centric elements or plot points as they are released and that encapsulate the narrative arc and/or user experience in sequence.

10–20 lines

Characterisation and attitude

This section will describe specific characters or key personalities in the show, game or main story. It provides the human element, looking at fictional protagonists and their roles, and how they could perhaps be represented in social media or on fictional websites. It will also refer to biographical information; insights into real people and specific roles users may be required to take on. Even a multi-platform service that is not story-centric will mention the style of the instruction, guides and overall attitude of the experience.

Approximately 1 page

Scripts

Examples of script writing are recommended, but the amount required for your bible will depend on what stage the project is at, with less required at early development. Whether it is five to ten lines of a social media exchange, a full-page script for a web video, or copy for a faux website, it is illustrative supporting material for the story world. This section should clearly list where pre-written material will be required to inform the rest of the document.

At least an initial 1–2 pages

User-centric scenarios

User-centric design begins by understanding typical users of your multi-platform project to such an extent that you can visualise them using it. This section will focus on three or four hypothetical and individual users, defined psychographically <http://bit.ly/LCkv86>, and describe at high level their chronological and individual routes through the service. It will highlight their particular lifestyles, and how the project is relevant to them. It will clearly state their points of entry (POEs) into the service, and elements that will motivate and call them to action. These 'colourful', textual descriptions will be used later to map out a global user journey.

Approximately 1 paragraph per user

02.

FUNCTIONAL SPECIFICATION

This chapter covers how the service actually works. The functional specification is a detailed description of the user experience and interface elements as a service architecture at a relatively high level, and builds a more rigid structure around the story or service treatment preceding it. Often written by the producer and experience designer together, it is the bridging section between story and the design/technical elements, and therefore is the centrepiece of the bible, linking to all other chapters. The functional specification chapter would include the following sections:

- + **Multi-platform form**
- + **Rules of engagement**
- + **Platforms and channels**
- + **Service build overview**
- + **User journey**
- + **Key events**
- + **Timelines**
- + **Interface and branding**

Multi-platform form

This is a catch-all format label and/or precise list of elements that defines what the service 'actually' is from a multiple platform perspective. Every multi-platform project can be described in a few words as a form, often made out of several sub-forms. Here are some examples of the components that may be a part of the service, and thereby indicate the form:

1. **Webisode:** audio or video content delivered as a developing fictional or social series. Often called podcasts, vodcasts or mobisodes.
2. **Community Hub:** a connected service site dedicated to growing and managing a community of interest around a property.
3. **Games – Casual:** easy to pick-up, dip in and out games, from single player to massively multiplayer.
4. **Physical Installation:** any project that is rooted in or focused around a fixed physical interactive build such as an interactive kiosk or sound installation. The interaction is often event-driven such as projection mapping at festivals.
5. **Social Film or Social TV:** a hybrid project combining social media and connected linear video elements.
6. **Games – Serious:** games that specifically put the user into real world scenarios to fulfill a range of objectives, or that use game mechanics but have an underlying educative intention.
7. **Location-based Service:** telling stories, running services or gameplay in defined, geo-cached, relatively large areas, layering digital elements over the real world using GPS systems or markers.
8. **Social Media Storytelling:** using a range of existing social network channels to deliver fictional or factual narrative.
9. **Games – 3D Worlds:** goal-driven game formats with high production values and extended narratives.
10. **Social Virtual Worlds:** a virtual shared space where the key intention is to allow users to socialise and create their own stories often around a shared theme; different from goal-orientated games.
11. **One-way websites:** an obvious category, the infamous static brochure website that can be used commercially or as part of a fictional narrative.

Although terminology varies across the digital industry, it is critical that the production bible for the service describes exactly 'what it is' from a functional form perspective. This section will also cover any special features or variations from the core components, as well as any unique mash-ups or combinations of elements.

1/2 – 1 page

Rules of engagement

This section covers high-level 'interface' and usability aspects of the service from a user perspective. In essence, it should paint a hands-on picture of the experience, including what users will be confronted with, what they can expect to have to agree to and challenges they will face. Depending on the form, the areas covered here will include first stages of level design, game mechanics, user contribution, subscription, API (Application Programming Interface) links with other services (eg Facebook Connect), privacy of data, user communication, and terms and conditions.

1–2 pages

Platforms and channels

Drilling down further, this section will list each platform and a likely range of channels or services on those platforms, covering at a high level what the content will be on each. For example, if the platform is a generic smart-phone, the range of channels used on that particular platform might include (a) generic SMS (b) a cross-mobile OS (operating system) bespoke-built app, and (c) a QR (quick response) pattern-based app. This section will document all channels as a reference point for the rest of the production bible, and is likely to be updated regularly throughout development and production.

1 page, probably tabulated

Service build overview

This section provides further details of each of the channels identified above, in approximately one paragraph each, to clarify exactly what needs to be created. Each component will either require a specific build or, if using existing open services such as YouTube and Twitter, a description of what content will be produced for those. These can be represented in a simple block diagram, so that the scope of production is clearly evident.

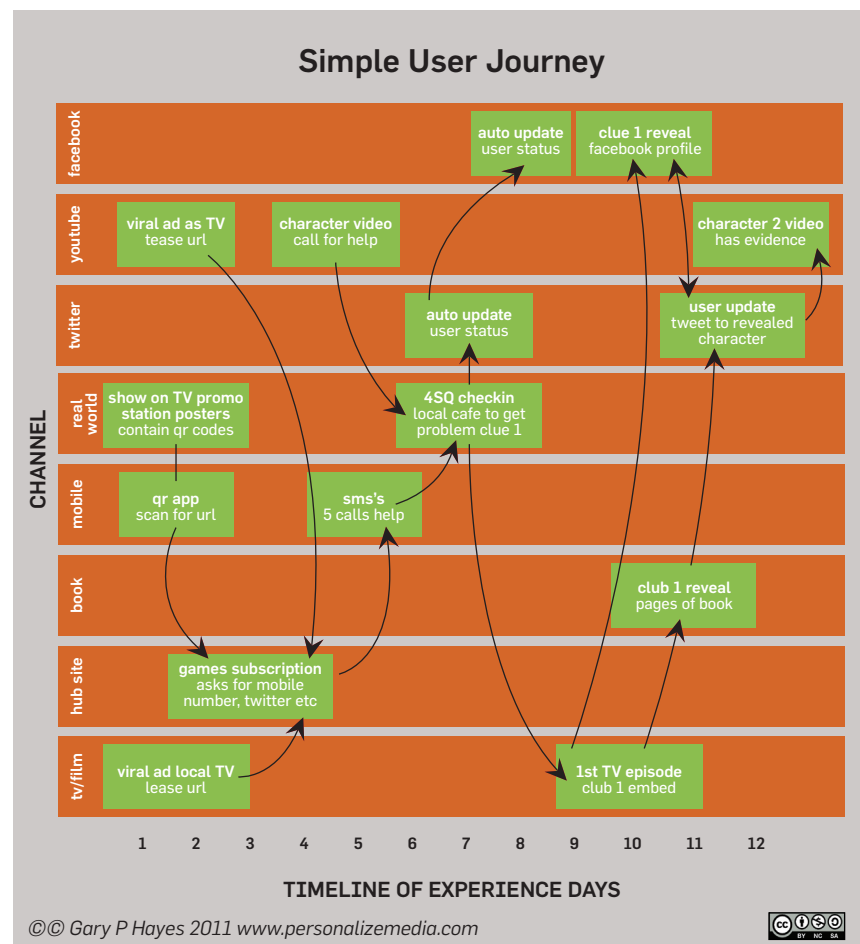
1 paragraph per item

PROJECT WEB BUILDS	EXISTING RESOURCES AND OTHER SERVICES	PROJECT NON-WEB BASED BUILDS
Project X Hub Web Site	Project X Google Earth Layer	Project X iPhone & iPad App
Project X Character Web Site	Project X Facebook Page	Project X Android App
Project X Web Flash Game	Project X 5 Twitter Accounts	Project X Pop-up Book
	Project X 6 Youtube Videos	Project X Rail Station Posters

User journey

This is primarily a diagram with accompanying notes, which figuratively demonstrates a range of routes through the service as a multi-channel / multi-platform experience, and echoes the user-centric user journey in the treatment section above. With time mapped on the X axis, and channel or platform on the Y axis, it provides a clear idea of dependencies and bridges between each component serving to highlight any issues with points of entry, calls to action (CTAs), or service exits. The text in each box should be used as a reference to a more detailed description of each component in a numbered list in the Key events section (see below). For projects launched all at the same time, such as a website or mobile app, this section should show from a UX (user experience) perspective the route users may take through each individual element of the service. Here is a basic example of a user journey through a 'detective' style pervasive game-like service:

1 landscape page per diagram (possibly multiple diagrams)



Key events

Essentially this is a key to the user journey chart above as a narrative description of elements, numbered in the chart. It will highlight the CTAs of each key event, detailing those triggers that will motivate the user through the service and/or across platforms, referring to how each fits into the context of the overall narrative. Depending on the complexity of the service, the user journey chart and key events, this may be split into chapters, seasons or weekly blocks. The level of detail required will depend on the status of production and purpose of the bible.

1–2 pages

Timelines

This is a short section combining the channels that need to be created (identified above), with a chronology of when they are required (as dictated by the user journey and key events). It will talk from a practical production perspective at reasonably high level about what needs to be in place in order to launch and progress the user journey through the key events. It should cover basic resource issues, top level numbers of people, and likely testing required. It can refer to specific dates and include traditional project management Gantt charts.

2 pages

Interface and branding

This section introduces, from a functional perspective, how dynamic elements such as branding or advertising may fit within and change across the service. It will contain guidelines for how the branding will integrate with the 'story', and a simple description of potential unique elements of the interface, including the thinking behind UI (user interface) and how this influences the design planning.

1/2 – 1 page

03.

DESIGN SPECIFICATION

This chapter provides an overview of the 'look & feel' of the visual and audio elements, much more detailed design components, branding guidelines, wireframes, style guides, fully mocked-up interfaces, and so on. It will add colour by visualising the story and functional components and as far as possible show finished designs for the service for each platform and channel. Sections would include:

- + **Design aesthetic**
- + **Branding and design guidelines introduction**
- + **Storyboard**
- + **Wireframes**
- + **Style guide, colour and font specs**
- + **Media design styles**
- + **Full assets list**

Design aesthetic

This section sets out the overall vision behind the design. Similar to the art direction in linear film and TV, it will describe and portray the environments and scenes from the story. For both fiction and utility services, this will include interface design, comparing and contrasting with existing projects, and clearly showing points of difference. It can also be extended with mood board examples illustrating the evolution of the design process.

1–2 pages

Branding and design guidelines introduction

This is a treatment and design style guide describing the thinking behind the branding of the property across platforms. It will cover aspects such as logo design and, where logos and other branding elements appear across channels, may have precise coordinate charts for each platform. It will also introduce the first sight of key interfaces for the service as mock-ups and 'look & feel' diagrams.

1 page text, 2–3 pages interface design mockups

Storyboard

This will be a designed walk-through of each of the platforms as a sequence of rendered interface windows, perhaps showing four or five key frames of each, to give a clear sense of the UI on that platform. Each frame will be described with a line or two covering how the menu, navigation, functional boxes, etc, will work. This is one of the key sections of the whole bible, and links to the user journey charts above, so the production team has a strong idea of how the platforms link as a whole. The storyboards can be as detailed as required depending on the status of development. If the bible is still functioning as a planning document then the storyboard can be limited to suggestive wireframes, but just prior to or during build the storyboard may actually advance to screen shots of work in progress.

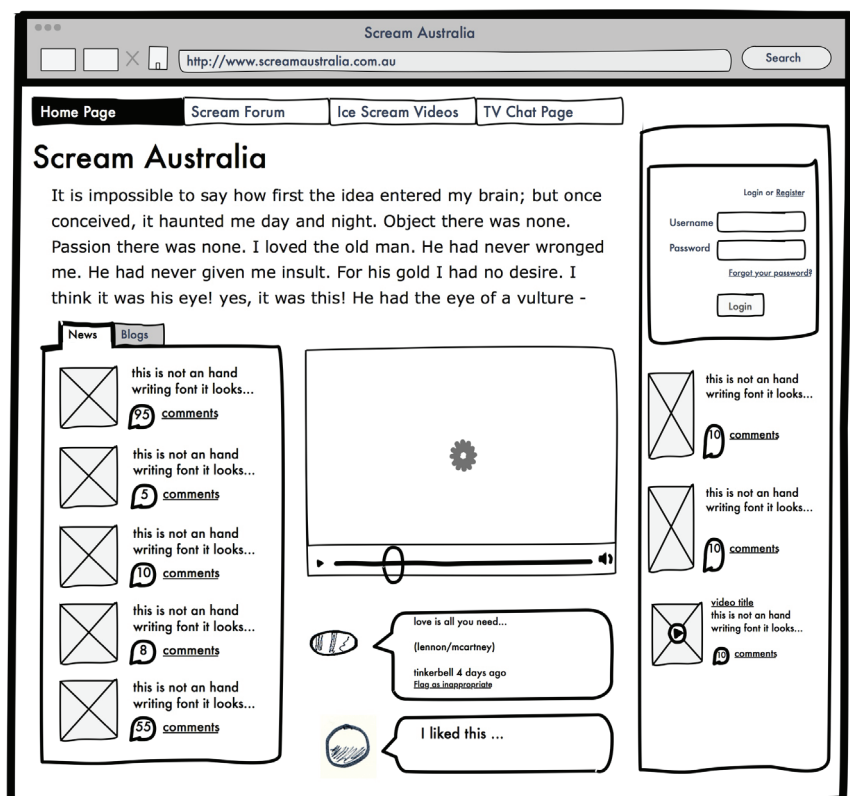
Planning 2–3 pages / Pre-production 8+ pages

Wireframes

Wireframes are detailed interface maps and outlined charts that will allow a web builder, games designer, or mobile app builder, for example, to create the structural elements of a build, prior to final assets and graphics being put in place. They can themselves be elements in the storyboard above, but are likely to have much more detail and so are best documented separately. The wireframe will usually have pixel coordinates and block references to different sections of the app, game scene or site. For early planning documents, these wireframes are not as important as 'look & feel' mockup designs, but are useful nonetheless to develop thinking around functionality.

1/2 – 1 page for each interface

Basic Web Wireframe Example



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Style guide, colour and font specs

Precise details of colour palettes, graphics and story boards are very important in implementing the design aesthetic. This section will detail a range of colours unique to the visual design, and list requirements such as RGB values, textures, font usage and other quantifiable design features. It will also cover at a high level the styles of artwork and photography and include key examples.

2 pages

Media design styles

As in linear production, emphasis on visual components often prevails. With full visual interfaces having been covered in earlier sections, this is the place to demonstrate other media elements. Audio & musical styles can be described (even linked to), along with examples of moving title sequences for trailers or short videos, spoken word, and many other media assets. This section should be a textual overview of the style of all media elements to provide cohesion with other visual elements.

1 page

Full assets list

Flowing on from previous sections, this provides a hierarchical list of assets to be produced, and will aid production planning if everyone is clear on what needs to be created vs bought in. During early planning stages, this will be high level, but as production nears will start to become a deep hierarchy of assets to create. It will focus on media assets that have a design need, rather than a pragmatic catch-all asset production list.

1-2 pages

04.

TECHNOLOGY SPECIFICATION

The nature of multi-platform services means the technology is dispersed, ever-changing, and often disconnected, so good technical planning is the most critical element of any service. This part of the document melds the functional with the design spec, and keeps an eye on story and business requirements. It's best written by a CTO (Chief Technical Officer) level person who does not get too lost in the 'coding' detail at this stage. Further into the document's evolution, precise build specs for each element can be added. Sections of this chapter would include:

- + **Technology platform vision**
- + **System architecture**
- + **Underlying magic in the technology**
- + **Service build infrastructure**
- + **Device methodology**
- + **User management**
- + **Content management, back-end and server**
- + **Coding and builds**
- + **QA testing**

Technology platform vision

This section is linked to the scoping and business requirements sections, and is a perspective on why certain platforms, devices or systems are being used. Why, for example, is a certain mobile device and operating system being used over another? Is it due to user need? Other aspects covered here are directly connected to the platforms identified in the Functional specification chapter, and highlight how differing platforms provide the ability to be connected, share assets or extend the experience seamlessly. This section refers to technical platform environments at a high level, of which some are detailed below:

- 2D PC web: traditional browser-based websites that can include Flash, HTML5, or simple rich media elements
- 3D PC: isometric or full 3D application or browser based game-like engines
- Mobile (generic): well connected handset sized smart-phones but also SMS only based handsets
- Tablets (generic): larger-screen portable, connected devices
- Connected TV & set top box: specific hardware connected to or integrated in large-screen TVs or cinema screens that effectively combine TV content and the web
- Specialised consoles: such as large games platforms, media boxes or handheld games devices
- Augmented reality: technologies allowing layering of digital content over the real world; primarily marker or location-based
- The real world: physical space
- TV sets
- Cinema screens

1-3 pages

System architecture

One or two very detailed charts will show how platforms, and the channels within them, are interconnected, and how content and data flows around this technical ecosystem. It will need some detailed descriptive text alongside, and in effect is the technical version of the User journey scenarios, the User journey chart and Storyboard – so needs to reference or be referenced from those.

Approximately 3 pages

Underlying magic in the technology

Although any service should not rely on new technology or a new use of existing technology, it is often the case that multi-platform services do feature something that makes the service special and different. So this section will highlight aspects of the project that make it stand out and may have marketing potential.

1/2 page

Service build infrastructure

This covers the multi-platform engines on which the service is delivered, and will refer to a hierarchical technical ecosystem for very complex services. It will make technical statements such as “the casual web game will be built in Flash CS5, AS3”, or “the webisodes will run on a bespoke Java engine built for all web browsers”. The hierarchy may refer to elements such as:

- Operating systems: Android, IOS, Windows, Linux, Mac OS, etc
- Coding environments: Java, Objective C, Action Script 3, HTML5, etc
- Open source engines: Wordpress, Drupal, Joomla, etc
- Client software/players/tools: Flash, Unity, OpenTV, Unreal, Crytek, etc
- Existing web services: Ning, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, etc
- Media formats: MP4, MP3, .exe, .gif etc

Approximately 3 pages

Device methodology

Multi-platform devices require their own thinking, and the range of smartphones/tablets or connected TVs, for example, is constantly evolving. This section will therefore detail key hardware choices and deployment issues. It will identify any cross-platform considerations (eg: PS3 vs Xbox vs Wii, or iPhone vs iPad vs iTouch), and also list specific models or versions of hardware that the service is focused on.

1 page

User management

A critical aspect of all multi-platform services is managing users in real time or asynchronously. Technically this section will define how user data collected from subscription and during the use of the service will be managed. There may be requirements to build bespoke systems that can both collect usage data and also communicate back to users automatically, and such requirements will be defined at high level here with specific examples of features that will be needed. This may be part of a broader CMS (Content Management System) or CPMS (Content Production Management System) definition.

1–2 pages

Content management, back-end and server

This describes how the complexity of many media assets will be managed and fed in and out of the service, as well as backups, managing user-generated content, and the server requirements. Some complex, real-time multi-platform services will require bespoke 'control dashboards' and associated back-ends to be built from scratch to manage the flow of content and users; these will be described here. The section will also detail, for example, the pros and cons of using third party hosting, content management software, or building something specific for this service. Overall it is a description of everything back-end that will glue the whole project together.

2–3 pages

Coding and builds

This section will detail any specific elements (eg, game engines, application interfaces, subscription systems, data management, etc) that need to be built from the ground up or modified from existing engines. It will detail both the coding environments, a sense of where that resource is, and a likely time estimate for development.

1 page

Quality assurance testing

Often referred to as just 'QA', this section will cover a how all elements of the service will be tested during development. For specific engine builds through to connectivity with third party services, it will provide an overview of the methodology rather than being a detailed guide, but will include timescales for testing and fully functional builds.

1/2 – 2 pages

05.

BUSINESS & MARKETING

This chapter could potentially be positioned first and 'boiler plate' the whole bible, depending on the overall nature of the service, with transmedia story at one end, through to multi-platform utility at the other. Sections would comprise:

- + **Goals**
- + **Success indicators**
- + **User need**
- + **Target audience and marketing**
- + **Business models**
- + **Projections, budgeting and timelines**
- + **Production team**
- + **Status and next steps**
- + **Copyright, IP & licensing**
- + **Summary and calls to action**

Goals

This section should cover three goals of the service, encapsulating the overall reason for creating it:

A. What do you want to achieve from the perspective of the user through the service? For example:

- Stimulate community-based storytelling
- Get the audience to be highly active during a live broadcast
- Create deeper engagement between scheduled events
- Get the audience to become active outside the home
- Stimulate massive community created content contribution
- Make the service highly personalised
- Develop a powerful tease service to a must-view linear property

B. What are the goals from the perspective of the creative team? For example:

- Reach a younger or older demographic
- Experiment with never before tried multi-platform concepts
- Improve the skills of the team
- Raise awareness of issues, social good or another media property
- Design a service that lasts two years and longer
- Build a strong female or male viewership
- Build a loyal local and/or international community for your property
- Increase the overall audience

C. What is the economic goal or model?

- Commercial: revenue generation through mature digital business models
- Marketing: at cost, promotional/marketing/advertising of another product or property
- Social good: at cost, awareness and issue raising or cultural, educational and/or artistic statements
- Experimental: a new type of project designed to push boundaries, with the freedom to fail and lose money but learn from

1 page

Success indicators

How will the stated goals be measured, and from those results how will you decide if the service has been successful? The KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and ROI (Return On Investment) are traditional ways to measure success, but from a story perspective there may be other engagement metrics you are building into your service/s.

1-2 pages

User need

This is a short high-level section covering the key question of why your service will be noticed and used. A simple user-needs analysis will highlight gaps in the market, weak competition, or just a strongly 'needed' utility-like service.

1 paragraph

Target audience and marketing

This section will cover two key areas: Who will use the service, and how will you attract them to it? It will include a demographic and psychographic breakdown of your user/audience, listing competing services or examples of similar services, quoting numbers. It will be a well researched comparative analysis and most likely use some bespoke research you have completed for the project. A logical progression from this is how you will attract and market to them so they are aware your service exists. A range of techniques from traditional to social media marketing needs to be covered here, and estimates of numbers over time should be front and centre. Another key element that needs to be covered is the community strategy for the service, confirming what will be put in place to grow a community of interest as well as a loyal subscriber base.

2-4 pages

Business models

This provides an overview of how the budget will be raised or revenue generated. For many multi-platform services there will be a mix of business models, so this section will detail primary and secondary models, which may include the following:

- Sponsorship (commercial or funded by agency)
- Advertising: text based or rich media advertising (surround or product placement)
- Subscription (to use the service): part of the freemium/premium model
- Transaction: direct sales of product, pay per use or premium or extended elements
- Affiliate marketing: money for connecting with like services
- Virtual currency: taking a percentage of exchanges for virtual currency from real world money
- Direct sales of the multi-platform 'format itself' to third parties
- Sales to market intelligence of anonymous user data
- Peer-to-peer: taking a percentage of user-to-user fees in your project's 'market', such as virtual goods exchanges or embedded online auctions
- Sales of product placement spots
- Donations to parts of whole elements of the service

This section need not detail likely revenues, but rather estimate likely numbers, and convince the reader that the models will genuinely work.

1-2 pages

Projections, budgeting and timelines

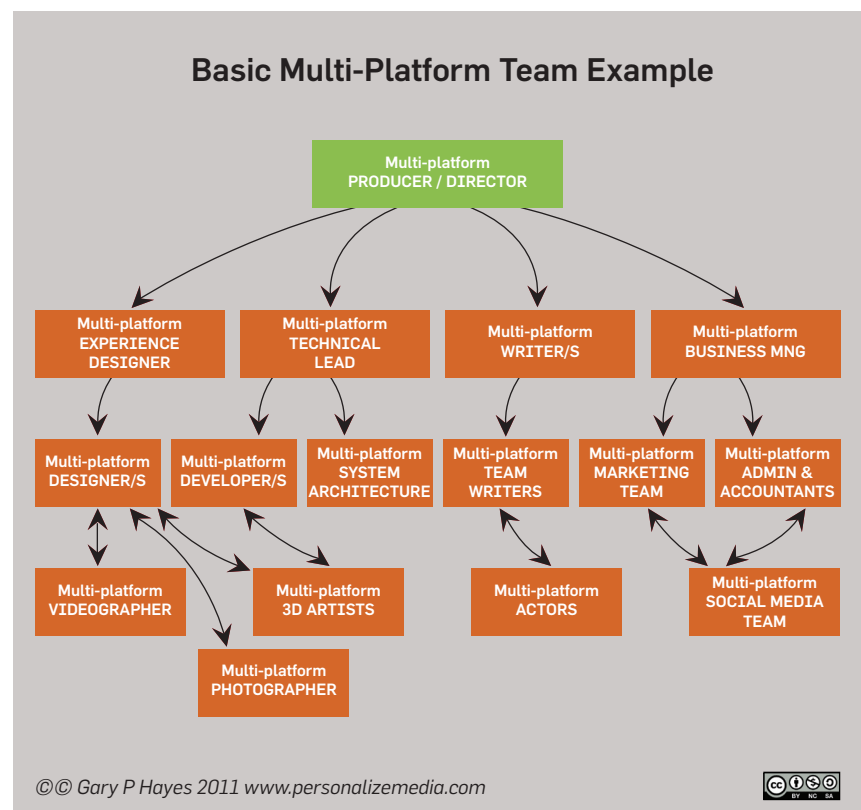
This section will detail all the important costs and/or likely revenues and/or profits from the service. It should include a spreadsheet listing how much the service will cost to build, and this may develop in granularity as the service planning moves forward. It will be linked to the schedule of production, and should break down potential budget spend at each milestone. Due to the nature of a complex production, the spreadsheet should also break down according to platform, so further down the track decisions can be made on deployment. Finally, a project management Gantt chart will minutely detail timelines linked to budget requirements. The projections will be a realistic assessment of likely revenues generated, including whether and when the project will break even and move into profit.

2-5 pages

Production team

It may be worth breaking this in to two sections. The first should be a full breakdown of the multi-disciplinary team related to this specific project, listing their individual multi-platform and/or transmedia roles and responsibilities. The second section provides biographical backgrounds on each of the team with head shots if possible. A complex project will require the key roles of transmedia producer/s, writer/s, designer/s, technical lead, system architect, programmers, business managers, marketing and so on to a maximum of say ten project leads.

1/2 – 1 page per team member



Status and next steps

Every complex multi-platform project will go through layers of parallel project development. This section should clearly list the status of the overall project across key areas including funding, development, investment, pre/post production, current production and delivery goals and date targets. It should also list progress for each of the main platforms individually, as there is likely to be significant staggering of development on each.

1–2 pages

Copyright, IP & licensing

This section will cover a range of intellectual property and other issues such as who owns the intellectual property (IP) in the story and created content, whether partners are taking overall shares as part of developing aspects of the service or investment, whether there is licensing interest in the service from third parties, and so on. It should highlight significant business conditions under which the project is operating.

1–3 pages

Summary and calls to action

Often the business and marketing plan is a natural finish to the production and/or planning bible from a production document perspective. As a presentation or submission document it is worth re-iterating the opening tags: why the service is unique, and key story or service goals as a focused wrap outside of the business plan.

1–2 pages
