

Jargonwatch:

Dark social

My grandmother is still haunted by that fateful day in 1958 when the Cleethorpes Ladies' Knitting Circle forgot to top up the electricity meter in the local parish hall.

A harrowing tale no doubt, but actually this has nothing to do with light bulbs going out on some octogenarian meet-up.

Glad to hear it. I wouldn't want her reliving the experience. The scars are enough to remind the poor love. Quite. As I was saying, what we're talking about is casting a light on those shady areas of the internet where people share information but don't necessarily register on measures of what we might think of as 'traditional' social media.

Like that film of Paris Hilton?

Not exactly. There's a common perception that Facebook, Twitter and the like were responsible for creating the 'social web.' All the data these social networks produce about the kinds of things people are sharing has tremendous value and is the benchmark by which to judge precisely how social a piece of content might be.

Certainly that's the view of the Cleethorpes Ladies' Knitting Circle's incumbent social media manager.

Well, she might want to think again. You see, some bright spark called Alexis Madrigal coined the term 'dark social' late last year to describe the fact that a huge amount of web traffic is generated from social interactions that happen through internet-based channels that are not Facebook, Twitter or, indeed, any other social network. Take email and instant messaging, for example. Standard web analytics categorise traffic from such sources as 'direct,' rather than, say, from a paid ad or social media site, because the person appears to be coming straight to the URL. In an article for The Atlantic, called Dark Social: We Have the Whole History of the Web Wrong, Madrigal suggests that "if you think optimising your Facebook page and tweets is 'optimising for social,' you're only halfway (or maybe 30%) correct." The point is we need to think differently about social media and find new ways to measure it, since around 69% of social referrals could be considered to have come from 'dark' sources.

Dark sauces, hey? You should hear my grandmother's chilling tale about her gravy browning.

Perhaps another time.

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WISE GUYS...

"We're living at a time when attention is the new music downloads and social networking, our

MyDigitalMedia

Stephen Hodge, MD, Toon Goggles



Which digital media innovator do you most admire and why?

Besides James Cahall, who happens to be the most talented CTO I have yet to work with, I admire Jason Kilar, former CEO of Hulu. I respect his vision of what television could be, and how he and his team were able to help open up room for discussion of other subscription VoD platforms like Toon Goggles. The model for Hulu was ahead of its time, while also being the obvious direction in which TV media is growing.

Pause for thought: What programmes are filling up your DVR right now, or are you a linear traditionalist?

To be honest, with my work schedule and with so much travel, I don't find much time for TV. As far as being a linear traditionalist, that wouldn't work for me; unless it's a live sporting event, DVR is the only way I'll be catching it. My DVR is currently set to record *Walking Dead*, *House Of Lies* and *Adventure Time* (for my kids).

How can television remain relevant?

This is a topic on which we have a lot of discussion internally, as we are busy looking at ways to become more relevant on TV platforms. The 'TV everywhere' approach has become more widely accepted. As the numbers of people using over-the-top devices has increased, we are noticing huge numbers 'cutting the cord' with traditional cable and satellite providers – just read the numbers. New media needs to learn how to create deeper, more immersive engagement with viewers, one that is compatible with multiple platforms and doesn't require the viewer to need a constant data connection.

What websites do you use each day and which do you find most useful or inspiring?

I stick to the trade sites like C21Media.net and Engadget.com. I also find sites like Reddit/Venturecapital and Venturebeat to be inspiring, what with the vast amount of digital start-ups that are now able to gain financing. This is due to more firms recognising that this sector has the potential to earn trillions of dollars sustainably over the coming decades.

How will content be different in the future?

Content will know what you want to experience before you even ask. Whether it's music, motion pictures, games or books, they will interact with every sense, not just the ear and eye. Just fathoming 3D printing, Michael Jackson as a hologram and the enormity of the internet in the span of a thought blows my mind! It illuminates infinite possibilities between communication and technology – or, in layman's terms, Skylander meets Toon Goggles meets Panadora.

What's the most played tune on your MP3?

Right now it's The Gaslamp Killer's first album. I try to go to LowEnd Theory once a month. If you're in LA and want an amazing underground DJ/HipHop/Dubstep show then it's for you.

Second Life: What would be your alter ego in a virtual world, or do you have one already?

If I were to play WOW I'd have to be an Orc Blood Mage. If I were to play Skyscanner, I'd be Stealth Elf.

Avatar from the past: Who would you most like to meet if they could be recreated in cyberspace, and why?

Isaac Newton and Leibniz, to discuss the consequences of unleashing the calculus upon mankind – and how it has forever bonded us with the wits to manifest our dreams.

What will be the biggest single challenge facing the content industry over the coming year?

How to engage and educate children as they further dissociate with the previous generation of media consumers. I have three children; they want what they want, when they want it – unless I say otherwise! The children's media and licensing industry seems so tied to the old model of timeslots and retail shelf-space and unwilling to take serious risks.

If you'd like to take part in MyDigitalMedia email jonathan@c21media.net