

ΤΟ ΨΗΦΙΑΚΟ ΟΠΤΙΚΟΑΚΟΥΣΤΙΚΟ ΠΡΟΪΟΝ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΤΙΚΗΣ ΔΙΑΧΕΙΡΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΙΑΝΟΜΗ ΤΟΥ ΜΕ ΠΑΡΑΔΟΣΙΑΚΟ ΤΡΟΠΟ ΣΤΟ ΕΥΡΥ ΚΟΙΝΟ

Η παρούσα εισήγηση ασχολείται με τους τρόπους με τους οποίους μπορεί ένα ψηφιακό οπτικοακουστικό έργο που έχει παραχθεί στο πλαίσιο ενός έργου πολιτιστικής διαχείρισης να διανεμηθεί στο ευρύ κοινό. Δεν αναλύονται οι δυνατότητες του διαδικτύου και των Νέων Μέσων σ' αυτό τον τομέα, αλλά μόνο οι παραδοσιακότεροι τρόποι διανομής.

Η παρούσα εισήγηση υποστηρίζει ότι η αναπτυσσόμενη “πολιτιστική βιομηχανία” διαχείρισης της ψηφιακής κληρονομιάς έχει πολλά να διδαχτεί από τους τρόπους διανομής των οπτικοακουστικών προϊόντων στις άλλες οπτικοακουστικές βιομηχανίες (των ταινιών ντοκιμαντέρ, των μυθοπλασιών, της εκπαιδευτικής τηλεόρασης κλπ). Οφείλει ακόμη να διεισδύσει στις περιφερειακές αγορές (εκπαιδευτική, σχολική, εταιρική αγορά κλπ) και να χρησιμοποιήσει γνωστούς και νέους διαύλους διανομής στο ευρύ κοινό (αναλογική τηλεόραση, επίγεια ψηφιακή τηλεόραση, δορυφορική τηλεόραση, ενοικιάσεις οπτικών δίσκων / DVD-video, πωλήσεις οπτικών δίσκων, ενσωμάτωση οπτικοακουστικών μέσων σε βιβλία, εφημερίδες και άλλους υλικούς φορείς κλπ). Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο είναι, όμως, απαραίτητη η κατάρτιση ειδικής στρατηγικής διανομής και προώθησης, η οποία να λαμβάνει υπ' όψιν την ιδιαίτερη ταυτότητα του οπτικοακουστικού προϊόντος της πολιτιστικής διαχείρισης και κληρονομιάς.

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The digital audiovisual product of cultural and heritage management
and the “traditional” channels of distribution

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the “traditional” ways of distributing an audiovisual product, which also happens to be the outcome of a cultural and heritage management project. Digital audiovisual products such as a video guide of a archeological site, a socio-ethnographical film on the festivities of a geographical region, an archeological film, a DVD-video documentary on a dance company or a presentation of the purposes of a museum, they all are audiovisual products of cultural and heritage management that serve in various ways the vocation and practice of managing cultural resources (the arts and heritage). Distribution refers to the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption. The term “traditional” excludes the channels of distribution that depend on the new technologies and media (internet sites, web TV, videocasting, etc). It implies the classical distribution channels, such as the broadcasters, and the niche markets such as the educational one, via which the audiovisual product of cultural and heritage management may expose its particular character and reach its audience.

The starting point of this research was the discovery that the cultural organisations know very little about the audiovisual products in the context of cultural management and almost nothing about their distribution and the way their production might become profitable. Surveys, such as the one by Bounia-Nikonanou-Pitsiava-Tsekouras about the audiovisuals in Greek Museums, prove that only recently the cultural institutions have decided to start exploring the possibilities of audiovisual communication for explaining and promoting their exhibition, their items or the purposes of their own organisation, whereas other types of communication, such as the printed material and the publications, are well established (Bounia-Nikonanou-Pitsiava-Tsekouras, 2006). Evidently, these organisations do not know how to deal

with the distribution of their audiovisual products even in the cases where they can cope successfully with the extended cost of their production.

Although the first and sometimes the only way of distribution that comes to mind is the selling process via the gift shop of the museum or the cultural organisation, the distribution of such products has several possibilities well tested and developed within the tradition of the audiovisual industries in the last decades. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to map these options, briefly explain one by one the distribution channels and their advantages, cite the niche markets concerning the particularity of the cultural management product and trace major issues of the strategy that needs to be developed during the distribution process.

2. THE NATURE OF THE PRODUCT

A digital audiovisual product is a two-dimensional representation, consisting of sound and image digital techniques, based on lens perspective so as to provide the illusion of depth, screened in particular, serial way in order to provide the illusion of motion but offering no interactivity to the audience.

A digital audiovisual product of cultural and heritage management is additionally the outcome of a cultural project and, therefore, it may incorporate all four “levels of experience” or, if it used in the service of another cultural product (an exhibition etc) become part of all four levels of its experience. As Hill, Sullivan and Sullivan suggest, based on theories of Kotler - Andreasen and Levitt, every cultural product offers:

- a “core” benefit, the connotative and symbolic values of the product itself.
- a “central” experience. The aspects of the central experience of the arts that surround the core benefit and mediate it to the customer in an acceptable way, provide an actual physical manifestation of the product and every aspect of its delivery (venue ambience, branding etc).
- an “extended” experience. It includes workshops, sponsorship and merchandise etc. They are all directly related to the nature of the product itself. By enhancing

them, the producer of the product and the cultural project can extend its offering to specific sectors of the market.

- a “potential” experience. For an arts customer, it covers a number of forms of deeper involvement: affiliation, membership, becoming a donor or volunteer or even a practitioner. (Hill- Sullivan-Sullivan, 1995, 105-108)

Within this context, the audiovisual products of cultural and heritage management may be divided in several categories according to the criteria selected. For instance, Alexandra Bounia and Niki Nikonanou use the criterion of the way the audiovisual products serve the purposes and the needs of a museum providing five categories;

1. Audiovisual products (“videos”) that aim to “introduce” the visitors to key concepts and ideas of the museums
2. Audiovisual products “in the exhibition” as an interpretation tool of the exhibition units
3. Audiovisual products “in and out” of the exhibition which concern the interpretation of the whole exhibition concept but might also be used independently of it
4. Audiovisual products “beyond the museum” that serve to promote the role of the cultural institution to the “big audience”
5. “Educational” videos addressed to particular groups of visitors in the context of the educational activities of the exhibition (Bounia-Nikonanou, 2005/2008, 174).

A complementary research may divide the audiovisual products according to their style, narrative and conditions of production. In such a way, these are:

1. Documentaries, that is audiovisual products that record as objectively as possible facts and events in the way they happened and led to certain results. These may be “historical documentaries” referring to facts that have happened in the past and been represented in the context of the documentary. Also, “direct-cinema-style documentaries” that record the facts at the same time as they take place or “documentary-essays”, that thoroughly analyse a subject using audiovisual methods.
2. “Educational” and instructional videos that aim to explain specific concepts or facts in a way defined by the age and other characteristics of their audience

3. “Corporate” videos that promote the identity of the cultural organisation or a special cultural initiative in the context of the external and internal public relations of the cultural institution
4. Television-style “commercials” that aim at promoting in a few seconds a particular activity of the cultural organisation.

3. MARKETS AND DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

As mentioned above, apart from the gift shop of the cultural organisation, there are several types of market available for distribution. These may be divided in two main categories:

- The providers’ markets, where the owner of the product sells the rights of its transmission or screening to the provider under very specific terms.
- The medium-based markets, where what is distributed via “rentailers” and retailers, is a medium (an optical disc, a tape or a reel) with the product, as well as the right of limited screenings.

The providers’ “traditional” markets include the theatrical exhibition and the broadcasting transmission. Typically, it is a “business to business distribution” that offers several advantages: perform the needed selling activities at relatively low cost, pass on market information to producer/owner of the audiovisual product and reduce the producer’s capital requirements (Dibb-Simkin-Pride-Ferrell, 1997, 618)

There are no additional expenses for the producer/owner of the audiovisual product as these distributors normally are responsible for the cost of reels, tapes etc. On the other hand, if they have not joined the production chain as co-producers from the beginning, they normally buy the rights at comparatively very low cost.

Theatrical distribution process necessarily involves theatrical distributors, who usually are large companies, and the theatrical exhibitors of each theatre. It is the privileged field for the two-hour fiction film with the huge budgets and the stars, and therefore, it is not really appropriate for the audiovisual products of cultural and heritage management. Moreover, theatrical distribution demands an additional cost of

the transfer of the digital material to the photosensitive film print in order to be projected to the theatres, a cost that may increase significantly the overall budget. On the other hand, in the last decade, there has been a strong turn of the theatrical exhibitors to the documentary genre, a fact which has permitted several documentaries to reach the theatrical audience. Therefore, it is not irrational to think of a cultural product in the form of a long-term documentary sponsored or co-produced by a cultural organisation that might find theatrical release and offer several advantages to the organisation in terms of reputation, prestige and revenue.

The broadcast markets consist of five areas: the public broadcasters, the private networks, the cable ones, the satellite ones whereas a fifth option, the digital terrestrial ones will soon replace the terrestrial ones. Traditionally, the public broadcasters are much more keen on the products of cultural and heritage management due to their character and style whereas the private networks seldom pay attention to cultural programmes due to their comparatively very low ratings. However, satellite, cable and digital terrestrial broadcasters are very often orientated to niche markets and thus they may be potential buyers. The most important particularity of this channel of distribution is that the broadcasters create most of their own programming or get a product through deals with studios and large producers and seldom by cultural organisations that do not have a regular production line. (Bosko, 2003, 164) However, if they participate in the production as co-producers from the beginning, then they directly distribute the product via their frequency.

The medium-based markets include, of course, the huge category of the Home Entertainment market, which refers to the distributors and the video clubs, the super markets and the electronic equipment stores that sell or hire optical discs and videotapes. However, this is hardly the right category for the cultural audiovisual product due to its nature described above; with limited exceptions, the audiovisual products of a cultural and heritage management projects usually refer to a subject related to the issues of cultural organisation or archeology and are addressed to a specific audience. Also, they normally have no famous protagonists, or other vehicles that attract the audience. Above all, they have a production value that cannot compete with the huge budgets of Hollywood and other industries' products. In practice, all these mean the audiovisual product can hardly appeal to the entire body of the

audience and find its position among the thousands of audiovisual products on the shelves of the big stores.

However, for the same reason these products can be directed at the so-called “institutional” markets, which are medium-based niche markets. The gift shop of the cultural institution belongs to this category. The term implies all these markets that are related to institutions, profitable and non-profit ones. These include

- schools and universities
- libraries
- cultural institutions and organisations
- social groups
- cultural clubs and associations.

This category might also include the enterprises that might distribute thousands of copies of the product for corporate and public relations purposes. The institutional markets attract a special audience, interested in learning, teaching and examining subject matter or issues relevant to the institution’s belief or reason for being. Thus, audiovisual products of cultural management are perfect for distribution within the institutional setting. (Bosko, 2003, 171) Moreover, the creation of a net among similar institutions might guarantee the successful effort of distributing cultural audiovisual products; for instance, a net among the gift shops of similar cultural institutions strengthens the possibilities of extended distribution and sales of an audiovisual product. The main disadvantage of the institutional market is the fact that the cost and the organisation of the reproduction of the product are on the producer/owner of the product.

Finally, a medium-based distribution is the “events sales” (Bosko, 2003, 176).

Whether industry-sanctioned or relevant to the general concept of the product, the special events offer to the producer some of the best routes to market the product. Seminars, conferences, lectures, festivals, commercial or non-commercial exhibitions are opportunities for the producer to meet a special audience, distributors, sales agents etc

4. SPECIAL ISSUES OF DISTRIBUTION

From the financial perspective, the audiovisual outcome of a cultural management project is a product, and like any other product it needs to be marketed: it needs to be promoted, to have the right price, to be put in the right place in the market. Therefore, distribution is related to the other steps of the general audiovisual project; the processes of development, pre-production, principal photography (shooting) and postproduction have predefined the subject, the title, the budget, the quality and the style of the audiovisual product and therefore, its identity and the audience it is addressed to. Additionally, it is related to the steps of marketing after the completion, such as the promotion and the pricing.

Due to the particular identity of the audiovisual product of a cultural and heritage management project, there are four issues of promotion and sales that should be checked closely.

a) Film festivals. Apart from the feature-film festivals known worldwide, there are dozens of film and video festivals specialised in almost every sector of culture; festivals on science, art documentaries, history, archeology etc. There are even festivals for the production and dissemination of audiovisual (films, videos) and multimedia (CD-ROM, DVD, Web sites) initiated or produced by museums or heritage and cultural institutions like the one of ICOM/AVICOM. What is important is the rules, the limits and the style of every festival and its audience so that they fit the product's identity and justify the expenses of its participation.

The participation in a festival offers three major opportunities:

- The promotion of the audiovisual product via the press and the people from the industry that participate in it.
- The direct distribution to a wider audience of hundreds or thousands of viewers that are de facto interested in such products and therefore, attend the festival.
- The option of coming to a selling agreement with a distributor that attends the festival.

b) Production of additional material, such as a documentary on the “making of” the audiovisual product, a trailer, interviews with the main protagonists of the project, TV commercials, photographic stills of the shooting process, promotional posters, publicity stands etc. All these that do not seem really important during the production process, might serve as the adequate link between the potential audience and the audiovisual product at the stage of promotion, according to the type of promotion and advertisement selected.

c) Printed and visual material that clearly explain what the product is. In fact, there are three groups of audience to which the product is addressed (Bosko 21)

- the intermediate people who buy and sell the product (distributors, sales agents, institutions etc.)
- the promoters (journalists, publicists, media, festivals etc.)
- the final consumers, the big audience (the final consumers who will buy or hire the product)

All these people should obtain an accurate and concise idea of what this product is and whom it concerns. A serious, multi layer media kit with short texts, additional material, reviews, CD-ROM with visual material and excerpts might cover this issue.

d) Product packaging. The video sleeves and the DVD cases might become the most important aspect of the product’s presentation in an era where the optical discs and tapes with audiovisual products can be found everywhere at very low prices or for free. Moreover, due to the particular identity of the product, it is recommended that the packaging might include printed material of a serious value. This concerns a book, an album or a big leaflet with analysis and additional information on the subject of the audiovisual product, apart from the information on the production of the audiovisual product. The presence of such printed material in the same packaging mixes the audiovisual product’s identity with a pure cultural product, like a book, and increases its value. By becoming a potential reader as well, the buyer of the audiovisual product might feel more familiar with the audiovisual product and consider as a bargain to buy two cultural products at the price of one.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper tried to map the ways of distributing an audiovisual product, which also is the outcome of a cultural and heritage management project. It briefly presented all the traditional channels of distribution as well as the possible markets for a cultural audiovisual product. It did so because the field remains pretty unexplored, although it offers a great opportunity for the cultural organisations to improve their income, increase their influence and prestige, reach a bigger audience than the one that simply visit their exhibition areas and provide a multi layer communication with the society that supports them. It is not irrational to say that in an era where state protectionism of the arts becomes less and less important and sufficient, it will be the success of distribution that defines several aspects of production and above all, the financial limits of the cultural and heritage management and its audiovisual products.

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