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# PLANET OMNIMEDIA

*by Adam Bezark*

**W**e're lucky. Our industry has always been ahead of the technology curve. We're the first to try new media formats, new software programs, new special effects. We have an insatiable appetite for using every last goody in the technology basket – not just multimedia, but what I call "Omnimedia."

But these days, the hottest techno-trends are aimed not at the control room, but the living room. Everyday consumers have access to a bewildering arsenal of Internet-based technology that lets them create their own multifaceted worlds and share them with others online. They spin their own websites, movies, blogs, podcasts. Your customers live on Planet Omnimedia.

*Which means you need to be there too.*

This new universe of streaming, consumer-controlled media offers you the opportunity to engage your guests long before they arrive, and long after they've gone home, by integrating and extending facets of your attraction into the Omnimedia universe. You'll reach more customers and strengthen the ties between the audience and your product, with the potential for deep-down, gut-level brand loyalty.

**HOW  
I  
LEARNED  
TO STOP  
WORRYING AND  
LOVE THE BLOG**

## **If you can't beat 'em, blog 'em.**

Our industry frequently characterizes the Internet, TiVo, PlayStation, Netflix and similar media vehicles as the enemy: the in-home entertainment that threatens our out-of-home offerings. Not only are they convenient; but consumers regard them as essentially free, so your paid attraction has to be doubly compelling in order to get 'em out of the house - so the mantra goes.





**Blogs facilitate self-expression and creative self-representation...will the real Adam Bezark please stand up?**

Instead of fighting or ignoring these home-based pleasures, let that barrier dissolve. Incorporate those “enemy” formats into the way you create and market your content. Many home-based technologies are (potentially) ideal tie-ins to your real world attraction.

But first, we’ve got to re-think our obsession with secrecy. There are so many ways for information to leak out that it’s almost guaranteed your project will end up on the Web somewhere. Every carpenter, electrician and plumber on your worksite carries a tiny digital camera — their mobile phone — and can upload bootleg photos to the Internet instantly.

Instead of fighting a losing battle, take charge of the information flow yourself and exploit your audience’s hunger for inside information. You might allow the project’s general description to leak out, but keep a few critical surprises under tight wraps until opening day.

Even better: consider creating an official Production Blog to follow your project’s progress. Blogs are the equivalent of an online journal. You post daily, weekly or monthly entries, breathlessly describing the race toward grand opening. Instead of other people leaking your secrets, you decide how much to



reveal, and when. Do it masterfully and you’ll intrigue your audience and begin to build a powerful relationship with them long before opening day. And since they’re getting info straight from the horse’s mouth, your fans are less likely to resort to unauthorized sources.

### If you love your media, let it go

Get ready: Abandoning secrecy and embracing Omnimedia also means sharing your content. The industry’s traditional approach to copyright protection — not to mention format and quality control — has been to keep our media under lock and key, ready to sue the knickers off anyone who dares post it online.



Understandable. But that’s not the way your audience out there views it. The Internet’s motto is “information wants to be free.” No matter how hard you try, people will find ways to capture your media and distribute it.

Realizing this, a few smart producers have decided to play into the media-sharing tsunami. George Lucas, the überbrandmeister, allows Star Wars fans to create fan films using music and visual elements from his movies. As long as they don’t sell the films, Lucas actually encourages the tributes. Fans love it, and the Star Wars brand gains ever-greater mythic status.

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Sound terrifying? Don't panic. In the case of physical attractions such as museums and theme parks, we have a natural advantage. Our projects tend to be so complex and multi-dimensional that there's no way to capture the entire experience without physically standing in the building. So while fans may be able to snag portions of your experience, they'll never get the whole thing. Anything the fans do manage to post actually serves as a nice "teaser" promotion, encouraging others to visit your property and get the full experience.

So – why not encourage the online community to use excerpts from your project? Instead of threatening them, provide high-quality media clips, giving users permission to incorporate the footage in their home movies, music videos, even spoofs (again, understanding it's for personal use only, not professional). These "mashups" let people get creative with your media... which they'll really appreciate.

### Make MySpace your space.

Planet Omnimedia is a whirl of online social activity. Community websites encourage people to make friends online, sharing their ideas and creations with other like-minded souls. Arguably the most popular of these today are Flickr, YouTube and MySpace. These virtual communities enable people to express themselves by posting photos and videos online, to create mini-websites and to share music, messages and blogs.

Rock bands use MySpace to promote their CDs and concert dates. Comedian Dane Cook convinced his network of over 700,000 fans to make his first album an overnight smash.

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So... why not tie your in-park "coaster-cam" photo service to a Flickr site allowing guests to view their screaming mugs online (and share their pics with friends who'll wish they were there)? Or post a time-lapse construction movie of your new animal exhibit on YouTube, updating it regularly as Opening Day approaches.

Remember to keep it smart. Omnimedians are smart, quick, and jaded. Don't spoon feed them.

## Build a virtual world.

Once the fans visit your attraction, another batch of opportunities begins. If your experience extends online, your guests can return there any time.

Let online visitors interact with the guests inside your experience. School groups might view your sea otters via a remote-controlled webcam, asking questions of the real world guests and animal trainers. Give future guests a virtual crack at your hi-tech shooting gallery, allowing them to practice (and ensuring they'll be happy to pay for a real visit).

The ultimate logical extension? Re-create your entire experience online.

There are a number of Internet worlds that allow users to create an imaginary character, or avatar, then walk around the world enjoying each others' virtual company while playing games. World of Warcraft ([www.worldofwarcraft.com](http://www.worldofwarcraft.com)) is a sword-and-sorcery universe with nearly seven million monthly paid citizens, while Neopets ([www.neopets.com](http://www.neopets.com)) is a kids' play world with no fees but plenty of crafty advertising impressions at every turn.

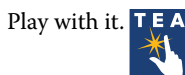
Perhaps only one company has, to date, created a complete virtual version of a real-world theme park... and of course, it's the amazing Disney brain trust. Virtual Magic Kingdom ([www.vmk.com](http://www.vmk.com)) is a loving, cartoonlike version of Disneyland, including detailed re-creations of Main Street, Tomorrowland, Adventureland and Fantasyland. Guests create adorable storybook avatars that stroll the park together, chatting and playing games based on the Jungle Cruise, Pirates of the Caribbean, Haunted Mansion and others. The game is free – there's not even any overt advertising – but VMK keeps the parks close to the public's heart even when they're outside the berm.



And to encourage real-world visits, guests can play special treasure hunts and trivia games inside the actual parks, with prizes that can be

redeemed once they get back to the online world. (It's crucial that the real and virtual versions of an attraction acknowledge one another.)

When moving into the online world, just as in the physical universe of entertainment attractions, the ultimate strategy is simple. Use everything Planet Omnimedia has to offer. Whether it's blogs, wikis (rats, we never got to those) or something totally new, the best bet is to let the boundaries continue to blur. It's all one big continuum out there: from the real world to the virtual.



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ADAM J. BEZARK is a leading creator of spectacular creative projects for theme parks, museums, and special events. Adam is a past President of the TEA's Western Division, and currently sits on the International Board of Directors. Visit The Bezark Company online (of course) at [www.bezark.com](http://www.bezark.com).

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