SUBMISSION FROM COLIN ANDERSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, DENKI

The primary issue affecting the Digital Media sector in Scotland at the moment is the lack of a commonly held vision and clearly defined long-term strategy that all government agencies, departments, investors, businesses, etc., can use as the basis for aligning their endeavours. There is no shortage of desire, intention, and effort to drive Digital Media forward in Scotland at present, and a shared long-term vision of how Scotland wants to use the considerable benefits Digital Media can offer would provide the necessary focus for all stakeholders.

In May 2014 at the "Nesta Spotlight on Digital R&D in the Arts" event at Creative Scotland's Edinburgh office the Cabinet Secretary, Fiona Hyslop, reiterated her belief that she did not want to see a top-down strategy for Digital Media imposed by Government. In principal this is a reasonable position for government to take as a starting point; however, it only remains reasonable when there is a credible strategy for Digital Media being set and driven by another party, such as academia, the industry themselves, or the industry's representative trade bodies,. This is where there is currently a gap needing addressed as none of these parties are currently providing the kind of vision and strategy required.

Government recognises the importance of Digital Media for the future economic and cultural prosperity of Scotland but does not want to impose a strategy for the sector, and the industry itself is not setting and driving any sort of cohesive strategy that looks likely to deliver a sustainable Scottish Digital Media industry for the long-term. The result is a slowing of momentum in the industry and Scotland remaining vulnerable to being overtaken by other nations pursuing more focused Digital Media strategies of their own.

From my perspective as a content creator and business owner working in Digital Media for more than two decades it seems clear this strategy gap requires a fresh approach if it is to be resolved. I have seen so many well-intentioned attempts to address these issues over the years that have failed to work for one reason or another. I can only conclude the problems cannot be solved by industry, government, or academia, alone or even in partnership due to the overwhelming complexity of the task. That's because the challenges are cross-industry, cross-discipline, and cross-demographic: partly commercial, partly technical, partly cutting-edge research, partly historical, partly cultural, and partly legislative. No one organisation or group of organisations, therefore, is suited to tackling it. It is bigger than any individual one of them, and yet requires more long-term focus than any practical collaboration might sustain. Instead it needs a bespoke solution - an alternative type of organisation, designed from the outset for the task and preferably one that has already proven capable of solving similarly complex issues for other industries in the past. I believe the organisation best suited to this task would be a National Digital Network for Scotland.

The United Kingdom already has a particularly good template for such an organisation because it was exactly this approach that ultimately solved the considerable challenges facing the Broadcast industry almost 100 years ago. These challenges are largely now forgotten but the similarities between the Broadcast industry a century ago and the Digital Media industry today are made obvious upon reading John Reith's contemporary accounts of the founding of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in 1922. Various attempts were initially made to address the problems facing broadcasting, but it wasn't until the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was established in 1927, independent of both industry and government and with a clear remit to fuse the disparate challenges of technology, audience expectations, societal needs, and legislative complexities together in the name of Public Service Broadcasting that real progress began to be made.

While the BBC today is no longer a suitable vehicle for setting up and running such an organisation for Digital and Interactive Media, the same principles that founded the BBC and subsequently established the United Kingdom at the forefront of the Broadcast industry remain perfectly suited to being applied once again in the establishing of a National Digital Network for Scotland. Many of the challenges the BBC faced as broadcasting started to move from a niche pastime for hobbyists into the ubiquitous mainstream opinion former we all recognise today have direct analogies with the issues facing the Digital Media industry at present. It is my opinion that taking a similar approach to solving these problems is what is needed to secure a long-term leading position at the forefront of interactive content creation for future generations.

I have identified practical ways of addressing most of the initial concerns the prospect of such an organisation immediately raises, such as funding, maintaining and promoting healthy market competition, etc. There are obviously important questions to address regarding the significant operational and logistical issues that would need to be overcome if a National Digital Network for Scotland was to be established, but none of these are insurmountable with sufficient political will. I would be happy to answer questions in detail if it would prove useful, however a detailed explanation is beyond the scope of this current discussion.

I presented an initial perspective on the benefits of a National Digital Network to the Scottish Broadcasting Conference in late 2010, but four years on no further feasibility study has yet been carried out. As I recall, it was an idea that proved somewhat controversial as not everyone saw the need, and I doubt the intervening years will have changed that much. However, I remain convinced a National Digital Network with a strong public-service focus ("bring the best of everything (interactive) into the greatest number of homes") would be an important step in ensuring as many as possible in our society benefit to the fullest extent that interactive media has to offer. Much as I am intensely proud of what the games industry has already achieved for the United Kingdom I am also acutely aware interactive media is about so much more than games. That's what disappoints me most each time I look at the disparity between where games are in comparison to other areas of interactive media, such as health and education. Games technology is way ahead, and it really shouldn't be, because there is no technological justification for it; the limitations are almost entirely market based. A National Digital Network would go a long way towards redressing this imbalance.

As someone working on the inside of the interactive industry I know Scotland's games sector already has the desire, ability, and vision to innovate across many other areas of interactive media besides games. And yet each time a company steps outside the mainstream they risk everything. That's because there is a proven market for interactive entertainment, and so the safe money chases it. There's already enough commercial risk in developing games without adding 'bucking market trends' to the list of challenges. While there is funding available to take risks the market may not support from government agencies, charities, and the like, the projects tend to be too short to sustain the long-term learning and dissemination of good practice required to fundamentally change the market driven industry. As a life-long gamer I love the choice and quality I currently enjoy in my gaming. I'd just prefer to see that choice and quality distributed more evenly across other areas where interactive media has yet to make its full impact felt. Areas such as the arts, humanities, health, education, research, and politics.

There's nowhere in the world better placed than the UK and Scotland in particular to reap the rewards of disrupting these sectors by applying interactive and digital media to them. Not the USA; not China; not Germany; not Japan; not India; not Brazil. Nowhere. That's

because in addition to our history of public service broadcasting we have also been building commercially successful digital products (both hardware and software) for more than 30 years now, and the knowledge and learning from that remains right here within our people. We have the pioneers in our digital industry leaders; we have the experienced teams who have brought so many products to market; we have supportive institutions in the universities, colleges, local enterprise agencies, industry trade bodies and the like that are familiar with the unique requirements of digital businesses; and I believe we have the societal need and the political will to focus on making these changes happen for the benefit of all.

If done thoughtfully, with real vision and a focus on long-term benefits for the benefit of public service in our society a National Digital Network could be used to improve the lives of everyone, just as our forebears achieved last century with broadcasting through the British Broadcasting Corporation.

This is the main challenge facing Digital Media at the present time and also the opportunity the Scottish Government has to lay the foundations for the future of Digital Media in Scotland and throughout the UK.

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