

Source: Michael Wesch, 785-532-6866, mwesch@k-state.edu
<http://www.k-state.edu/media/mediaguide/bios/weschbio.html>
News release prepared by: Erinn Barcomb-Peterson, 785-532-6415, ebarcomb@k-state.edu

Media Relations
9 Anderson Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506-0117
785-532-6415
Fax: 785-532-6418
E-mail: media@k-state.edu
kstate.edu/media

Tuesday, June 23, 2009

K-STATE WEB 2.0 EXPERT TELLS HOLLYWOOD HEAVYWEIGHTS HOW YOUTUBE IS CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE; SAYS TO EXPECT MORE AMATEUR PRODUCTIONS, PROMOTIONS ON YOUTUBE

MANHATTAN — If you watched the No. 4 movie in the country in early May, you didn't see it at the local cineplex but rather on your computer screen.

"The Hunt for Gollum," created by volunteers for about \$5,000, had 1.3 million viewers in the first week, topped only by "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," "Star Trek" and a romantic comedy starring Matthew McConaughey.

"One of the things that this can alert us to is that someone with a good story could very likely do something that could be seen by millions of people," said Michael Wesch, assistant professor of anthropology at Kansas State University. "Compare the production quality of 'The Hunt for Gollum' to 'Robocop,' and, in a way, amateurs are only 10 or 15 years behind. With \$5,000 you can produce what used to take millions of dollars to produce, and a good story can carry bad production values."

That was part of the message that Wesch, who studies the Web 2.0 culture, took to Hollywood recently. The Wrap, an entertainment industry Web site, invited him to present his research to film and television producers, along with major players from Google and YouTube.

Wesch said that YouTube, paired with consumer-grade computer programs and recording equipment, has given rise to user-generated content that's basically free. He showed the producers some examples of bad user-generated content — some of it intentionally bad — such as a homemade version of "The Matrix."

"I think at that point they were thinking, 'We have nothing to worry about,'" Wesch said. "I think their thought is that it takes millions of dollars to produce a high-quality film."

In the future, Wesch said, movie and television fans can expect to find more user-generated content, as well as Hollywood using YouTube as a way to generate buzz around movies shown in the theater and on DVD.

"Hollywood realizes that creating a community around a movie will help sales," Wesch said. "Social media is all about helping people create communities."

Although online advertising is still undervalued, Wesch said that as broadband comes to television sets he sees Hollywood realizing the value in putting its content on YouTube.

(more)

An example might be hybridizing television and YouTube, Wesch said, citing the CBS program "Harper's Island" as an example. To understand all of what's going on in the story, viewers have to not only watch the broadcast but also related YouTube videos.

"And some of the people watching the YouTube content make their own videos and maybe sometimes pretend to be part of the action," Wesch said.

The blurring lines between Hollywood-generated and user-generated content is one way that YouTube is changing the way stories are told, Wesch said. Another is the blurring between fiction and reality, he said, citing the example of what seemed to be a budding romance between two video posters playing out in front of the world. It turned out that Emokid21Ohio and Emogirl21 already knew each other and that their video posts were part of a performance.

"This happens time and time and time again on YouTube," Wesch said. "Somebody fakes it and they get caught, and then everybody is just like, 'I don't care — keep going. This is a good story.'"

Yet Wesch's message to Hollywood and its fans isn't one of doom and gloom for traditional movies and television shows. Of all traditional industries, Wesch said, Hollywood may be one of the most safe. After all, he said, it already weathered the revolution that let us watch movies on demand in our own homes.

"Before Hollywood crumbles, you would have to see actors' and actresses' wages come way down," he said. "There are a lot of great actors and actresses willing to work for, say, \$20,000 a movie because they love it and want to entertain people."

Wesch also cites the prevalence of film festivals and high-quality productions made by film students and other amateurs in the arts.

"There's a lot of energy that goes into all kinds of entertainment, especially on college campuses, and these are really fantastic communal events that bring people together," he said.

Besides, for many people there's still something special about seeing a movie at the theater.

"There are many communal experiences you can have, but seeing a movie is definitely one of them," Wesch said.

#