EngageMedia is a website and a network for distributing social justice and environmental video from South East Asia, Australia and the Pacific. It is a space for critical documentary, fiction, artistic and experimental works that can help challenge the one-way communication model of the mainstream media.

The growth of digital tools such as peer-to-peer networks and increased bandwidth mean distributing high-resolution video online is becoming more and more viable. There is great potential for video makers to take advantage of new technologies and bypass the control of big media conglomerates.

EngageMedia aims to demystify and provide access to these new technologies, create an online archive of independent video productions using Creative Commons licenses and form a peer network of video makers, educators and screening organisations.

Statement of Aims

- To assist individuals and groups producing thought-provoking and informative media focused on social and environmental issues to distribute their work.
- To develop the digital media and Internet skills of independent video makers and marginalised communities.
- To foster a regional network of producers, to assist each other in producing and distributing their work in the South East Asia and Pacific region.
- To produce an online video delivery platform under a GNU General Public License[i] that others are free to use and modify for their own media projects.

Background

Media tools have always been vital for the growth and sustainability of movements for social change. They provide not just alternative information, but the communications channels through which movements organise themselves and build new social relations.

EngageMedia sees itself as part of a tradition of radical media practitioners; from the soapbox campaigners and progressive press of the early 20th century, to the community radio movements and alternative publishing of the 60s and 70s. Social movements have always harnessed the communications forms of their day in an effort to inspire and give voice to those who struggle for a better world.

EngageMedia is a community driven project based on the concept of participatory media. Those who use the site are also the people who produce it's content - community involvement is the driving force behind the project. In practical terms this means video makers will upload their content to the site, add details of their group or project and use the space as a self-organising tool for further collaborations.

There are no 'consumers' of EngageMedia as such, as we aim to actively challenge the consumer/producer paradigm of traditional media. People using the site are also active participants in creating it. We believe media that poses a genuine alternative to the mainstream requires building upon the collective intelligence of collaborative networks. That is, drawing on people's capacity to tell their own stories.

Groups and individuals will be able to download and use content to assist in their social justice and environmental campaigns, or to use as an educational resource. We are focussing on Australia, the Pacific and South East Asia, as we want to build cross-border cultural relations within the region and facilitate this sharing of cultures through grassroots communication networks. The project aims to provide a global distribution tool for local community media makers who would otherwise be unable to distribute their film widely.

Beyond this, we feel the strengthening of ties between filmmakers in the region will bridge the boundaries that often artificially divide us, expose us to cultures and points of view we might previously have never discovered, hopefully contributing to the creation of a more understanding world.

We feel this project can make a difference by providing access to audio-visual material that would otherwise be difficult to come by. The moving image has for a long time been one of the most powerful forms of media - its use by social justice organisations is vital in order for many campaigns to be effective.

Experiences in alternative and grassroots media have made it clear to us that the mainstream media rarely accurately portray or give voice to social justice issues. Many organisations here in Melbourne such as 3CR or SKA TV have addressed these issues by creating their own media institutions, by the people and for the people. These spaces now need to be created on the Internet, which has the potential to be an even more empowering tool for social change.

Community television stations around Australia are struggling with the prospect of limited access to digital TV licenses and digital broadcast transmitters. It makes sense to take up online distribution as an alternative channel to distribute community media. We want to help community TV producers to also distribute their work online, as audiences move towards the Internet.

Overseas a range of online video projects have begun to emerge: in Italy *New Global Vision* <ngvision.org>; in the UK *Beyond TV* <beyondtv.org>; globally with *Indymedia Video* <video.indymedia.org>; and most extensively through the US based *Internet Archive* <archive.org>. However, for those wishing to distribute video online about social and environmental issues - within, for and about this region - there is a gap. We can fill this hole by utilising new online tools to build infrastructures that will carry community issues into the future and make them relevant to a new generation whose media habits have changed considerably.

Media Concentration and Cross Media Ownership

Full Coalition control of the Senate in Australia means proposed changes to cross media ownership laws will almost certainly be passed. These changes will have significant impacts on media diversity and will mean an even more highly concentrated media-scape in Australia. Australia already has one of the highest rates of media concentration in the western world. Under these conditions the construction of real alternatives is essential given that large corporate interests are unlikely to take up issues of social justice - often they do the very opposite and are aligned to large, powerful and politically conservative interests.

The effect of the US/Australia free trade agreement with its removal of restrictions on quotas for locally produced content will also dampen the little diversity we already have, and force out local issues that people can take direct action upon. EngageMedia, in contrast, will foster a community of producers and viewers of media with an emphasis on interactivity that is designed to enhance community participation.

Technology and Collaboration

Increased access to video making tools such as cameras and laptops have meant the way video is produced has changed. A few years ago having access to a video production equipment meant either having lots of money or collectively sharing equipment. It meant production was centralised and people had to pool resources to have a single space to meet and work.

Today production is increasingly decentralised which has both positive and negative effects. It is positive in that more people have access to the tools of production. One of the things lost, however, is the space in which people meet to collaborate. The new technologies and production methods require new ways of organising, a new network of exchange which the Internet can provide.

Whilst access to production tools has been opened up, increased access to distribution tools is only just emerging. EngageMedia is a project to democratise the means of distribution and create a powerful networking tool for media makers to swap, share and work together.

An Online Video Archive

There are many ways people and groups viewing video on EngageMedia may choose to use content they have downloaded.

For example an organisation in Adelaide working around issues of asylum seeker rights could search for and download videos about that issue. They could then screen them locally as a fundraiser, ask their local community TV station to air the films, place the videos on CDs in information packs or just share them on computer with friends.

Similarly a geography teacher organising a class about issues in South East Asia could visit the site and download materials about poverty in Jakarta, or human rights in Thailand, and use them as teaching tools that might be much more effective than reading from a text book.

Progressive film making as a whole will benefit from the creation of an online historical archive of filmmaking and the documentation of movements that have shaped and will come to shape our world.

Creative Commons

Another key aspect of EngageMedia is the use of Creative Commons <http://creativecommons.org> to license works available on the site. Creative Commons provides flexible copyright licenses for authors and artists, allowing the creator of a work to choose a license that makes their work freely available for non-profit purposes, or even to be freely remixed into new works.

Functionality

Here's a list of things you will be able to do on EngageMedia:

- Upload your videos. These videos will be automatically available for download from our server via http, and also using BitTorrent. Video uploading functionality will be developing as we go forward, allowing for large video files to be uploaded through the web and via FTP. Further down the track will we be enabling automatic transcoding to standard video formats on upload.
- Browse videos. Browse through categories of video within Topic, Country or Genre, or look at latest or featured videos.
- Assign a Creative Commons license to your video. This license will be displayed when users download your video.
- Add tags to your video. These tags will form a Cloud that users can browse, forming a collaborative categorisation system (folksonomy).
- Vodcasting - generate a video feed which you can then import into a client such as ITunes or Democracy Player, which will automatically download new videos to your computer when a new video is updated. You could subscribe to the latest videos feed or to a specific Member's video feed, or pick your feed by criteria such as Topic, Genre or Country.
- Profile Page - create a page about you and your video work, which includes a listing of your video contributions to EngageMedia.
- Post an Event about a video screening, workshop or festival.
- Post a News item about developments in the world of video activism, tactical media or the new participatory culture breeding on the Internet.
- Members workspace - use this space to upload videos, events, news, files or pages. You'll be able to use EngageMedia as your own work area, not just a place to publish or watch video. Groups will be able to use their workspace as a collaborative working space in which to manage group projects together.
- Contact other Members of EngageMedia through the website to discuss collaborations or give feedback.
- Comment on videos after you've watched them.
- Send someone an email about a page you want them to see by clicking an icon.
- Upload and download videos and subscribe to video feeds via mobile phone.

Some of these features will be available soon, while others will be rolled out in future releases.

Technology

We are utilizing Plone on Zope for our Content Management System (CMS), customising and integrating multimedia products specifically for independent video producers, citizen journalists and NGOs. This CMS is licensed under the GNU-GPL and is freely available to use, copy and modify. Our own version of this code will also be freely available for others to download, install and develop for use in their own projects. If you are a programmer interested in contributing to the project, please contact us at contact@engagemedia.org