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Business blogging

OK, let's get down to the nitty gritty. Since blogs are just web pages, all you need is a computer, space on a web hosting server for your pages, and time to create the blog. But there is an easier way to go. There are numerous applications and one of the most popular is Blogger.com (owned by Google). This site allows you to set up a Weblog in about 10 minutes. Radio Userland is another popular hosted option. It runs on your desktop and will automatically build your weblog, organise and archive your posts, and publish to the Web in minutes. If you already have your own Web server, the blog tools to consider are Movable Type and Greymatter. They both allow you to manage and update weblogs, journals and frequently-updated website content. So you've got your blog up and running: how do you post to it? There are many different tools to use to post to your blog. Many of the applications allow you to simply post from a desktop client. You can also email your postings and even post by mobile phone (the next wave, dubbed moblogging). Now how do you tell the world? Enter RSS which stands for Really Simple Syndication. Post your Weblog entries in the XML specification RSS. Then readers all over the world can view your blog entries on content aggregator newsreaders. And then of course there are the traditional ways: an e-newsletter, your home page, a press release. And don't forget the golden rule—be honest. Happy blogging!

Got a question for the Digital Doctor? Email heather.albrecht@digitalconnections.com.au
Heather Albrecht is a digital strategist and trainer and lectures for the UTS/AFA Executive Certificate in eMarketing.
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Raising the bar for online film promotion

Last year, Australian film distributors released more than 250 films. Two thirds were Hollywood films distributed by a handful of large companies. Each of these companies stage several major, if formulaic, releases each month.

A single agency will manage releases for one distributor and each week will spit out another hackneyed creative concept or cut-and-paste media plan for this month's blockbuster. Nowhere is this more true than online.

Film sites and promotions are developed by an agency at launch to drive immediate sales. Agencies are briefed by the distribution company, which has defined the budget and timeframe for each project.

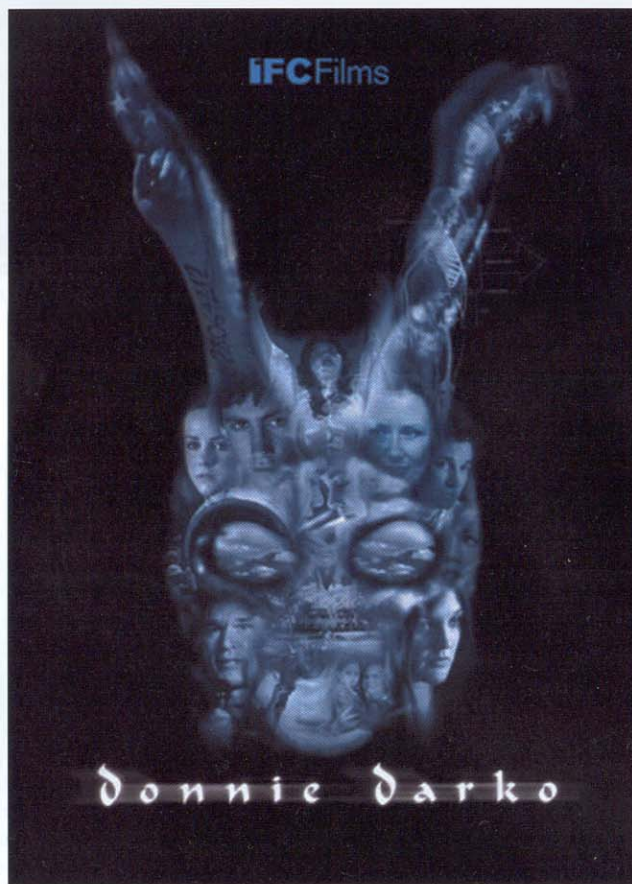
As a result, most sites for films from overseas (which represent 92% of releases) are constructed through a process of 'bricolage'. Odds and ends from international marketing collateral are thrown together: a downloadable trailer, the poster as wallpaper, interviews with the cast, perhaps even some behind-the-scenes stills. If it is a busy week, it's just easier to localise the German site entirely, or re-run French banners with different copy!

A film's website serves a singular and simple purpose—the generation of cinema ticket sales, or home rental and purchase. But a funny thing has happened over the past decade or two. Films have become brands and are no longer a "single consumption" product.

Today's cinema release will be available to buy on DVD in eight weeks, for rental in 10, on cable within six months, and on free-to-air within nine. Then you have to flog the soundtrack, pitch the computer game tie in, promote the TV spin-off and announce the special edition of the book. And all this while the studio slaves away on an eagerly awaited sequel.

In such a scenario, the tedium of film websites is even more terrible. An online presence can serve to deepen the audience's relationship with the "brand", pushing advocacy and repeat purchasing. It can act as a nexus for cross-selling related products. And it can extend the creative product. I'm not going to try and sell you on that last bit. Instead, let's ask a pragmatic question—how?

Film websites should be an integral part of the production process, not the marketing process. They need to be attached to the finances, creative talent and timeline



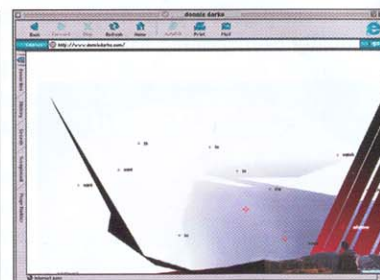
Donnie Darko website (left and below) an example of a superb imaginative online execution for a film.

of the production itself. As long as sites and promotions are conceptualised at the end of that production pipeline, they will be inherently limited in scope.

A film is a creative product. It is driven and shepherded by talent which not only understands the product but is passionate about it. Developing online components should be the role of the original creative minds.

Of course, this is not the solution for everyone. There are some films out there which do deserve the kind of sites they receive.

But it is those occasional projects which push the boundaries of cinema and stand out creatively that are done a disservice by a site just thrown together for a two-week deadline on a shoestring budget. Until the writer, the director, the production design-



ner, the strategist and the web developer sit in a room together, we won't know the outcome of that creative journey. But it could be breakthrough websites—such as those for *Donnie Darko* and *Lord of the Rings*: websites that keep a film alive long after the DVD is in the weekly section.

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