

ByteNoise

The Digital Revolution, Part Four: The Future of Entertainment

So how are producers of entertainment supposed to make a living if they cannot profit from creating intangible things and then exclusively mass producing them?

Firstly, it is possible to have a day job making something useful, and a hobby making something entertaining. While a lot of people seem to think it is their right to get paid to have a dream job, it may not be economically feasible much longer now that everyone has access to copying technology. Yes, the quality of entertainment will suffer, but perhaps it's an acceptable trade-off.

Imagine a whole world of skilled amateurs making songs, stories and videos that they pour their heart and soul into, for everyone to share freely and enjoy. We're starting to see this more already as the cost of tools decreases and the Internet makes everyone a self-publisher.

If you don't like the sound of that, don't worry. I doubt everyone will have to keep their day job. Playing live music is often cited as a job that will remain both profitable and fun, and it's by no means the only one.

There should always be a need for commission work. If you

want something specific, then you won't necessarily be able to take something that already exists and copy it. You may well have to pay someone to create an original work of art for you. Even if there are no publishers because every writer self publishes her own work, a lot of those writers will still pay artists to draw covers for them purely because they want their work to be adorned with attractive imagery. If a budding director wants to make a film, he may still pay a musician to make incidental music for him.

It's also possible that people will one day pay for mass produced things *before* they're made, on the basis that they like the idea so much that they'll invest some money in the project, giving the artist an incentive to spend more of her time on that particular project rather than any of her others. In a world where consumers could read movie treatments and decide which one they want to give people financial incentive to create, the most popular ideas would become the highest budget films — and the likely result may not even be that different to present day films, as the overall lower budgets should be offset by the cheaper equipment required to make the films.

In the case of books and music, if you're living in a developed country then you already have all you need to create your art without needing any more money at all. If you make enough money to create your art full time, great. If not, stick with your day job and create things for the fun of it rather than for financial gain. (This is what I do, and I can assure you I still find it fulfilling.)

In all likelihood, the main difference we should see as a result of the increase of amateur piracy and amateur productions is that there should be more creative works made by more people with less talent (as a result of having less time to practice due to

maintaining a day job) and less equipment, that more people can access. As time goes on, I suspect that some of these amateur artists may become as wildly popular as some professional ones are today, and their art may become more extravagant and glossy, as they earn the money and time required to make higher quality entertainment. Even before that happens, overall, people should have more choice. The market should favour more diversity.

Currently, artists cover the full spectrum of talent and lack thereof, but publishers work as a filter to only show the general public the top fraction of these people (not necessarily filtering their individual works equally well). With a major shift towards amateur art, with less money involved and more people involved, we should start to see many more talentless people, but this is more due to the veil being lifted than due to a decrease in talent.

Even though a lot more people will join in the creative process, and start submitting their works to the general public before they've put in enough time to become talented, this needn't diminish our appreciation of those who put in enough effort and practice to attain genuine talent. If anything, their apparent scarcity in an abundance of bad works may even highlight their value.

So although we should see many more talentless people, I cannot predict whether we will see less or more talented people. Hopefully more, as the knowledge of how to perfect any given craft is made available to more people than the current privileged few. In this sense, freeing or pirating guidebooks could be as important as freeing or pirating the end result of the art itself.

So in the end, I suspect the artists amongst us will do just fine. Many will have to get day jobs, but more people will hopefully discover that if they do something they love for long enough, then the practice will translate into talent, which will in turn earn them the respect and modest side income they deserve. Despite the myth perpetuated by modern commercialism, this is probably more than most of today's artists see. In other words, the artists themselves will be just fine. It's the distributors who will be out of a job.

So what can you do to usher in this potential new era?

Don't illegally copy things. If you don't want to pay to be locked into the corporations' DRM schemes, avoid those particular works altogether. If you really want to get their works, put up with their DRM schemes. You don't need to be all-or-nothing about it, you can decide what you will and won't put up with on a case by case basis.

Instead of pirating things, try any of the following:

- Support writers, musicians and artists who let you freely copy their work
- Create things in your spare time while holding down a useful day job
- Distribute your work under a Creative Commons or public domain license

Alternatively, if you don't agree with what I've just said, that's fine too. Show your support for the current business model by continuing to buy things that can be easily copied. Either way, the system itself should work things out sooner or later. It just needs a little nudge sometimes.

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