

While My iPad Gently Tweets

Creative Director and Blogger **Gary Day-Ellison** gives us an account of his personal experience since the February Like Minds, Exeter Conference. And wonders what lies ahead . . .

RIGHT FROM THE START I must put this article in context. The magazine contains insights from the great and the good in Social Media. They all bring a wealth of expertise, research and erudition that I respect and could never attempt to match. All I wish to put 'out there' is just my personal experience over the 8 months since the last *Like Minds*.

A wake-up call from Richard Carpenter

Just a few days before the last *Like Minds* conference in Exeter, late February, Social Media meant nothing to me at all. Zero. I live and work on Dartmoor, in Devon, in splendid isolation. Richard Carpenter (@Assistor) of Enterprise Assist, a superb business mentor in the Exeter region, told me in no uncertain terms that he greatly admired my work but was frustrated at my hidden portfolio, reluctance to network and my flat refusal to cold call. In my defence I simply find that approaching people for work does not work for me. Most are too busy, it seems to undermine the perceived value your skills and sets you up for semi-servility rather than professional co-operation. So many presentations but it still makes me a bag of nerves!

At that time I was already working on design & art direction of *The Music of the Lord of the Rings Films*. A complex 416 page illustrated book. North American Author and Musicologist, Doug Adams (@dougadamslotr) had approached and it was a big project going well. No connection with Social Media, I thought.

Richard was sure *Like Minds* would suit this recalcitrant freelancer. Frankly, I thought Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Narcissism.com *et al* was just dumb. Not for me. Do I care about the domestic minutiae of other people's lives? *No*. Do I think anyone should be interested in mine? *No*.

I was very sceptical. But Richard is a smart cookie. So I booked in, scrubbed up and turned out. There was a definite buzz at the venue. Everybody, and I mean everybody, had a nailed on, maximum battery-drainage, iPhone or Blackberry. Was it a press launch for a new Apple iTeacup? A rumour that the next-best-thing band might turn up? Bit geeky for me surely? This Social Media gig has to be just a blizzard of personal trivia meeting an avalanche of digital marketeers, surely? Hype-detector on 'stun'.



Jonathan Akwue shatters my assumptions

First up, I recall, was Jonathan Akwue (@JonAkwue) telling us about his project for the NHS, effectively using cellphones and Social Media to reach out to young adults with a confidential advice service on Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Blimey! What's this? It had made me sit up and listen. My preconceptions about trivia were really being challenged here.

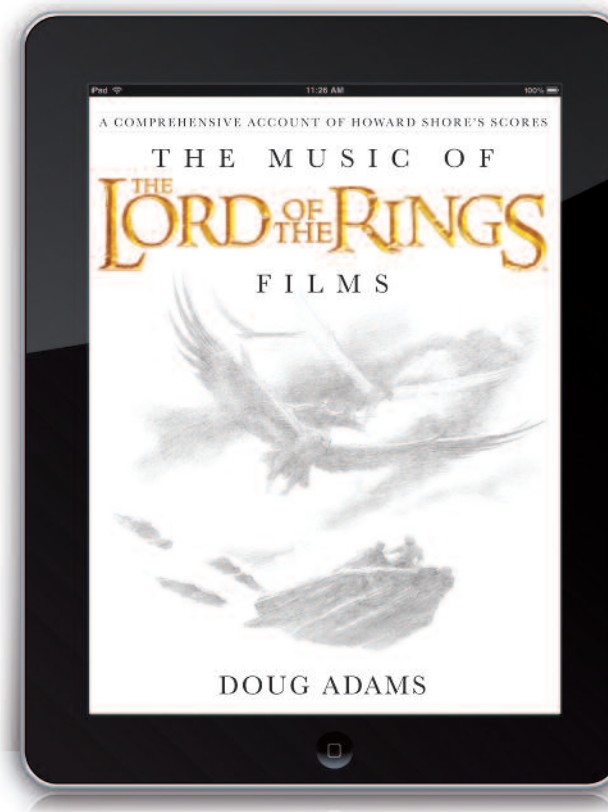
And this was just the start. Topics covered the way information flow could outpace the bad guys. Why everybody loses when big business tries to coat-tail youth trends. How major corporations can both engage with, and respond to, customers as multiple-individuals. How SMEs can communicate with some character and personality. How ideas can light a wild-fire. Hang on, that's where I live, I thought! At every stage the *Like Minds* event was slick, well-organised, fast-paced, varied, informative, highly professional and particularly good-humoured. Great speakers, mixed panels and open floors to lively participants.

On review, it came down to this for me. Content and quality top my priorities list. And yup, you can Tweet "Starbucks, 10am, cool!" but "E=MC²" fits in 140 characters too. Social Media may be in need of a better name but a lot of smarter people than me are finding a gazillion ways to use this phenomena for good, for profit, for better communications, and it's still evolving.

I later discovered Doug Adams and Howe Records had initially identified me by Googling through to my website via tags such as Art Direction, Book Design, Alan Lee, Tolkien and Decca Records. They established my *bona fides* via my LinkedIn CV & Recommendations. Doug had spent 10 years making his project happen and he had used his blogging skills to involve, inform and grow his audience. The key contributors on the project were spread over four continents, Skype, e-mail, Facebook, .Me and FTP all played their part in our extensive communications. Solid proof that we *can* develop and deliver large projects to anywhere on the globe. Despite BT's glacial broadband service.

Scott Gould jump-starts my Blogging

A convivial Exeter meeting saw Scott Gould (@ScottGould) zero in on the issue of my self-promotional vacuum again. Smart thing was that his attack had an embedded solution. He pushed me hard to do a Posterous blog with the backstories to selected design examples. What persuaded me was the notion that I could



replace PR puff with my own voice, something I feel much happier with. The whole notion of sharing authentic information and enthusiasms as opposed to marketing persuasion sits more naturally with me.

Fortunately, there are some famous names whose work I design for and well-known companies I've worked with but I am honestly shocked to see 10,000 average views across the first 10 posts. Utterly amazing. First post on Douglas Adams' *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy Trilogy*. Most recently, Doug (no relation) Adams' *The Music of the Lord of the Rings Films*. All via Shirley Conran, Oliver Sacks, Brian Eno, The Beatles and others. Next job is to figure out how to encourage people to leave comments and open up discussion. That's a hint.

Mark Jennings sweetens the Tweeting

While a blog gives you time to explain, Twitter is very different. But I find that the desk-bound, Mac-based life of graphics sits easily with Tweetdeck chirruping away on the laptop. I started by following the full roster of *Like Minds* speakers and just paid attention and listened. Twitter influencers are too many to name, for the same reasons I try to selectively use #FF – a list is invidious and praise requires a valid reason attached. Otherwise it's just an ego-trip. But I had fascinating insights from Mark Jennings (@markofrespect) on use of current protocol, asking questions, answering questions when prompted, RT & DM etiquette. I was especially keen to know how to ply your trade without *too* heavy a hand.

From a tentative start I have not enjoyed seamless progress either. My sense of humour takes risks sometimes. My mojo stirs to the unpredictable. At one stage my profile simply announced *The Random Musings of the Perpetually Bewildered*. Wise council from a strict Scott Gould prompted me to change that in favour of stating my line of work. I had to learn to think twice and Tweet once. And when I naively fell for a Free iPad Scam I thought I had destroyed any credibility at a stroke. But central to Mark's advice was the encouragement to genuinely engage with people and not just witter and advertise.

So the next *Like Minds* Conference is here. This time instead of reading the magazine I am designing it. I am told I'm a little less of a hermit (though my wife can be known to confiscate the iPad) and a little bit more chatty with a widening network of largely

terrific, diverse people. I tell my professional story in a way I am more at ease with. And I am more convinced than ever that, whatever the form of communication, the quality of the content is key. Still learning, of course but if I can pass on anything of value from my brief life as a Blogger and Twitter user is this – Be yourself and consider others.

What's Next?

So far, so good. The new iPad is great fun. I have wanted one since seeing 2001: A Space Odyssey as a kid. They just hadn't made one yet! TuneIn Radio App has changed my listening habits. Will there be one for world TV? Maps App means I don't get lost so often. Augmented Reality has me excited and I hope it is more than the next 3-D Film novelty. My conviction is that whatever new pipeline comes along what flows through it will always be the most important issue. Facebook is becoming less of a personal space, which is a shame. And I still find myself adjusting to others shifting definitions of friendship and privacy. If you ever hear me use *friending* as a verb, please shoot me.

Now I have to find the secret keys to extending new-found reach to engagement with future clients in as many different fields as possible. I am intrigued by the complementary potential of books & apps. Somewhat disappointed at the endlessly bland templates that pass as design in website territory. In particular, I hope to see new areas of visual communications being *design* driven by art directors working alongside good programmers, the F1 engineers that develop the ever more powerful engines.

Whatever comes next let's keep it honest and make it creative. As for innovation – bring it on!

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