

TD 04 – Charlie Phillips, The Guardian

You met him at Sheffield doc fest, how he is the director of the documentary department, a new working field but also a new way of producing films so a new constellation of where our films are seen, and the documentaries of our students. Thank you that you came. It's a pleasure to be here.

OK, we're ready. So hello, I'm Charlie, so confusingly I am no longer at Sheffield Doc Fest but due to a glitch in my presentation all of these slides have the Sheffield doc fest logo, so just pretend you can't see that. I do this presentation especially for today, but there are technical issues so I wish I would be able to get rid of that it's terribly embarrassing. So I'm not at DocFest I am here, at the Guardian, so just to put myself in contact briefly, at Sheffield I run our market. I did all of the events where people pitching ideas for funding or distribution or just any more support could be match made with commissioners or funders of any kind.

Through that I got very excited about the crowd and the possibility that through online funders and supporters and collaborators, there would be a new way of getting documentaries made. Seen by more people and this is essentially what I am doing at the Guardian, so I've been at the Guardian for about 2 and a half weeks. So I'd love to be able to say, give you an enter vision of what I am going to be doing there. But I can't do that as yet, but what I am doing I am head of documentaries there so the main task I have there is to first devise what we are going to do with documentaries. But within that work out how we can make the Guardian the home for doing documentaries on line. And this is incredibly relevant for documentary students, probably more than anyone else in the industry because a majority of people are over in using online video, are people under 30.

Approximately 42% of the Guardian's demographic is estimated to come from people under 27. And in terms of people watching videos it's higher, it's like 65%. So there is a real power to be taken here because to put it bluntly, younger filmmakers can understand what they want to do with online video,

more than older filmmakers. So I am really interested in learning from how documentary students could use a platform like the Guardian and the basic thing that I am doing at the Guardian. Is that I am commissioning short form documentary, so we are going to be doing, documentaries of approximately 10-15 minutes. They could be shorter versions of longer docs. So it could be that I meet with a documentary maker, who is planning to make a full 80 minute documentary but its not going to be ready for 2 years or 3 years. They've not got any money, so I would say to them well, here's £10,000 approximately. And I want you to make me a 10 minute version of your doc that you deliver to me within 3 months. And that means they can do, it's almost like development money. They can go and they can shoot and they can do something that works amazingly well for us and also enables them to effectively trail the film for funders. So they can go to Stormville or the BFI or whoever else and say this, my film has been in the Guardian. The Guardian has invested in me its got 100,000 views...

And that shows that there is an audience for this doc. So that's the kind of thing we are trying to do, it's a new model, were very excited about it. And I think they're particularly excited about it because it's such a massive potential audience on the Guardian. This is a kind of thing I want to talk about going back to my presentation. I feel like there is a real continuity from what I was doing at DocFest, where I was trying to get documentary film makers to understand the old world of commissioning and the new, how they could come together. And what I'm doing at the Guardian which is totally about the new world of online audiences, online viewers, online funders.

So these are the things we briefly touch on, crowd funding which is the idea that the crowd, the audience, entrepreneur people fund your films. Crowd sourcing which is the idea that the audience contributes ideas and resources towards your film. But mainly I want to talk about the Internet and this is the essential thing for being able to harness the crowd. It really does all come down to being able to understand the Internet and to understand online, because that's where the crowd is. Sorry about the weird display here.

Because that's where the audience is, that's where the crowd lives. It would be almost impossible to go out to, you know the market square and ask people to give you money or ask people to help you make your doc. Online you've got millions of people out there who want to help you. And this is the kind of message I think you should be transmitting to your student, that they need to understand that online is the place where their going to get their documentaries made.

So these are some of the stats on the Guardian. The Guardian has 140 million monthly browser visits. You know and that's quite a lot, as you probably know. It's quite a significant portion of the world. Of the, online audiences, theatrically that could be 140 million people watching your students films. In reality I'm not going to pretend that all those people are watching films on the Guardian, let alone watching documentaries on the Guardian. But it is a lot of people who could share your content. It's a lot of people who, even if they only watch the first minute, of a documentary, their going to tell loads of people about it, share it on social media, their going to tell the world that its possible to watch documentaries on the Guardian.

And this is very exciting to me its, its not just relying on the audience on for documentary to watching it and then forget about it, then never do anything about it again. Your relying on them to tell, you know all their Twitter followers, all their Facebook friends. That it is a good thing to watch documentaries online, so people are going to be spreading the whole concept of watching more documentaries online.

That means all the old gatekeepers of traditional commissioning editors from TV lose a lot of their power. Because your get lots of new, you get new gate keepers, me, but the audience themselves become key. It's the audience, it's the Twitter combination for example. Who are deciding what is and isn't going to be talked about. So I've said a little about the difference between crowd funding and crowd sourcing, these are two ideas that kind of get squashed together, quite a lot. Actually when I, I've been doing talks like this on crowd funding for quite a few years now. And I always used to say I don't want to

talk about crowd sourcing because I didn't really think it was relevant to the conversation. But actually I now think that it totally is, and actually the same skills that you use with the crowd to fund a film are exactly the same skills you use in building the crowd, who are going to watch the film and are going to tell other people the film as well. So I'm interested in talking about both of them.

I'm going to start by saying a little bit about crowd funding and I really wanted to stress that if you take nothing away, from this presentation and you think its all ridiculous. The one thing that you should take is that you get your students to try crowd funding their documentaries. I genuinely believe that every filmmaker should run at least one crowd funding campaign. Especially if they're young and they don't have immediate networks in the industry, because crowd funding is how you build that network. And its how you build skills, being entrepreneurial and self-reliant. Its essential, its not a fad, its something you should go into your lecture halls and tell everyone that the should do. And I'm sorry to tell you what to do, but I think that's what you should do.

So its, crowd funding is the idea rather than going to a commissioning editor, including me and saying can I have £10,000 and relying on that one person. It's the idea that you go to 10,000 people and ask them to give you one pound. Or less, maybe go to 1,000 people and ask them to give you ten pounds. And it's the idea that people give money to films that they believe in. People who give money to a film, or a band or a new bit of, I phone, maybe not a I phone but a new bit of technology and think its going to be important to them and the wider world. And that's it that's, that's the simple thing. You believe in something, you give money to it and its completely boomed in recent years because of things like Kickstarter which is the worlds main crowd funding platform. You've probably all seen it but this is Kickstarter. Kickstarter is, anyone can put a project, anyone can try and put a project on Kickstarter, you put your project on. Oh sorry hold on.

You put your project on, I'll just click on anything random, like this I mean this is a music project that I'm going to bring up now. But you put up your project and you ask for the money you want. And you try and get to your goal in this case its \$25,000. You offer people, you tell people what the project is, you offer them rewards and you eventually get towards your target. I'm just going to bring this up, I'm going to talk about one in a minute. Oh no sorry about that. Ok so yeah, I think it's a very democratic form of raising money, its far more democratic than any other system of raising money for documentaries. And it's as easy for a student to do it as it is for like Pennebaker let's say so dear Pennebaker recently has run a crowdfunding campaign. And it's absolutely no easier for him then it is for every student across the world, it's all about being able to motivate people.

So you know if there is cynicism out there, I just want to say there is nothing demeaning about crowd funding. It's not about begging for money, it's about building a collaborative network around you. And it's about knowing what you can offer to a audience that's going to make them feel like they are collaborators, in this project. So your not really saying to your crowd, you know give me some money because you need money...

You're saying to them: let's go on an adventure together, lets make a documentary, or any other kind of film, together. That's what it's all about opening up the process of film making to collaboration. Oops, sorry, and I, not only should tell all your students to crowd fund. But I think you should tell them how to crowd fund, and its really simple, these are the only rules you need to know. You need to have, and I'm going to use, I'm going to flick between these just so I can to show you a bit about it. So basically we are going to use this project as an example on how to do crowd funding well. This is, this is a, it was crowd funded at the start of 2013. The film is finished, its about the be released, around the world in the next 6 months and it's a documentary about, teen cinema between 1995 and 2004. Which was the golden age, second golden age of teenage cinema.

I think this is a really exemplary crowd-funding project for a number of reasons. The first reason that it recognised a demand. Charlie Lyne is a blogger. He wasn't really a filmmaker at the time, he was basically a film fan and he recognized that there was a demand for a documentary on teen cinema, done in an entertaining way. So he appealed directly to fans of teen cinema because he knew that there was a demand out there. He also knew that he wasn't going to be able to raise the money in any kind of traditional way.

Because this is a documentary made up of hundreds and hundreds of other people films. It's a film, it's got lots of clips from Hollywood films, indie films, all cleared and under fair use dealing. It's a whole new area that I can talk to people about. And he did a brilliant crowd funding video that appealed directly to the crowd. So that he can say to them why I want your money, so hopefully this will work, I'm just going to play this video for you.

[plays clip from *Beyond Clueless*]

Cool, so I hope you got most of that he speaks almost as fast as me, sharing my first name. But its, anyone can do that even your students can do a crowd funding video like that. But that video is great, it does things like includes little in jokes, so that if you are into teen cinema of that era, it would make you laugh and you would say this is a doc for me. I'm going to give money to it. So there is humour there, he writes really entertainingly about, there is very beautiful art work. And it's just a very clear pitch about why this doc needs to be made. It explains exactly how they are going to clear all the clips, to be honest most of the people who would donate to a campaign like this wouldn't care about the legal reasons. And one of the things he did particularly well, was that he offered lots of low priced perks.

These are the perks down the side, these are the things that if you spend money you get something back. He knew that a lot of the people giving to this film would be, would be students, without, young people without much money.

So he priced lots of things at a low price, things like 110 people giving 10 pounds. And the rewards were amazing things like fan things that he made, things like posters, a kind of special party where you got to have pizza. All of this stuff is quite incredible stuff, like audio commentaries. You get all of these special things as they give to a project like this, they feel special as well.

So someone like Charlie is an entrepreneur, that's the kind of skill that students really need now. They need to understand that their not just film makers, their not just creative people, they have to be entrepreneurs. Because no one is going to help them, not me, not you, they're alone in the industry and they need to think like entrepreneurs. And the people who are going to help mostly are the crowd, it's other filmmakers, it's documentary audience. Those are the people who are going to help them now.

So they need to know how to communicate with a crowd. And these are the sorts of things that are going to motivate the crowd. It's going to be, and this is what, when your'e doing a crowd funding project or when you are crowd sourcing for your doc. These are the things that you need to think about because these are the things that motivate a individual member of the crowd. You might be able to say to someone this documentary is going to make a massive difference to the world. So your going to watch this and your going to be able to tell people, this is why you've got to save the gorillas living in a remote nature reserve in the democratic republic of the Congo.

For example, or you might say to the crowd. Or you could say this is going to make you an activist by watching this film, you are, this is going to help with your activism and this particular cause that you believe in. or you might be able to say to a particular member of the crowd, you know, this, you are going to feel like you are supporting something in the same way you support a football team. So you can say you are a fan of *Beyond Clueless*. You're going to push and push it so more and more people can see it, but what's especially important as a, someone who is going to be good with working with a crowd, understand how to build for the future. Because that crowd that you build up

for one film, that crowd of maybe only 200 people who funded a film, those 200 people who are evangelist for your work...

They're going to tell another 200 people. So this is sort of what I mean about telling your students they need to be entrepreneurs, they need to think about how their going to build and build their crowd. Because if their not going to be reliant in commissioners, their going to kind of have to constantly expand their crowd with every film. And this is the kind of theory of crowd funding, clear of spreading risk, clear of, make It not kind of the creator and recipient relationship. But having a collaborative relationship. But having a collaborative relationship where you're sharing risk. So if you run a campaign it's not just the risk that you as the filmmaker are taking, it's everyone who is giving to the film is taking that risk with you as well. And it makes it less alone for you.

And this is, Matt Locke runs a conference called *The Story* in London and he's written lots of amazing things about this. If you understand your audience, they're going to be your collaborators, that's an essential skill for anyone to have, especially new film makers. I've got other projects I want to talk about but lets not dwell on it too much, talking about *Beyond Clueless* again. This is a game that was crowd funded, lets move onto some other stuff. So sometimes when I talk about these things I think everyone kind of varies a bit, but aren't actually sure, how you, who, who their crowd is. How they build up the crowd around them. And these are just some basic, basic skills.

The first thing and its not even there is the start of your crowd is your family and friends. There is no shame in reaching out to the people who are most invested in you, your family and your 25 closest friends. They are the start of your crowd, them alone aren't going to be the ones that are going to get your documentary funded or seen. So reaching out beyond them, you look at bloggers or social media, people who are very active on social media. People who are very interested in the particular niche that you operate in.

So in the case of *Beyond Clueless* you would look at bloggers and tweeters who write a lot about teen cinema. Or about independent film, people who

write about essay film or people who write about documentary actually. And you say to them can you write something about my crowdfunding campaign? And sometimes they will do it sometimes they won't, it depends how engaged they are with the thing you're making. But if it's a subject particularly interesting to their readers or their twitter followers, then they will probably do it. It expands the crowd around you. There are bloggers and tweeters who are particularly interested in new talent, so purely for the basis for I want support new talent they will write about it.

If it's a particular cause based campaign then you can reach out to charities or NGOs or other organisations. Who you are going to help spread the message of film, so the example I used now of saving gorillas in Congo. Which is actually take from the film *Virunga* by the way, I didn't just make it up. You know in that case you would go, who would want to spread the word about a crowd funded documentary about saving animal and protecting a nature reserve? Well it's probably going to be like animal charities like WWF or PETA or, you know, Greenpeace. Anyone like that, so you get to spread the word about it and when you talk to them about the campaign. You would be, you wouldn't pick up the phone and go I need you to help me raise money, because I need money, you've got 2 million people on Twitter following...

So you need to help me. The pitch to them would be, I am, we are going to do this documentary which is going to further the cause of saving a nature reserve, which is very important to your mailing list. So could you tell them to help my campaign? Can you get them to help me because this is going to save a nature reserve. So it's the kind of, you know, that's the pitch basically. This is important to your members, this is important to your followers.

You can go onto things like Internet forums, get into Twitter conversations, just be present online and just talking to people who might be interested in the subject of your crowd funding. There are loads of other rules and ways to do a successful crowd funding campaign. But these are the key things; be part of the conversation in the crowd.

These are the kind of golden rules of being able to get funded in anything. You really have to make it fun. Funding of anything but particularly documentaries is kind of made out to be too serious. No one whether they're a commissioner or a part of the crowd wants someone lecturing them why this is really important. You want someone to come up to you and say, we are doing this awesome documentary, were going on this awesome adventure, making this doc you know, do you want to join my gang and do this. So you really do have to make it fun I really do believe in that. Because it's so based around the individual film maker or the film making team, seeming like people you would want to work with so that's like a really crucial message you need to go and tell the audience. Like don't be too uptight asking for money, if you're going to tell the crowd you need to make it seem fun. And make the crowd feel as through their part of the team, not just at your service, they are your collaborators and that's how you motivate them.

And this is, Jennifer Fox has done this crowd funding campaign and this is her slightly provocative comment. It goes along with what I have just said, you know no one has a god given right to be a filmmaker or to have their films funded. It kind of is a privilege and it's a privilege people can choose. So you do need to make it seem fun and you do need to make people involved or its just not motivating to them.

Just to overcome any final resistances as the whether people should crowd fund or not. These are the kind of key questions like you know. Do you have enough people around you that you can genuinely motivate to work with you? Because if you don't, you don't know anyone you don't have any friends, you don't have any family and you don't think anybody is interested in the objective of your film. Then you probably couldn't crowd fund but I don't believe that's actually true of anyone or any film. The question is whether you've given anything people can feel grateful for. I, the whole kind of economy for the crowd and of sharing, its all about shared gratitude so I've supported loads of crowd funding campaigns.

And that meant when I was one of the people running a crowd funding campaigns that Sheffield doc fest ran a couple of years ago the gratitude kind of came back, not just to me but for everyone in DocFest. If you do something nice for someone they will do something nice back to you. It's that simple, its true in life and its true in documentary funding. So that's really important as well, so basically if your students have never been nice to anyone or have never done anything good for someone. Then tell them not to crowd fund, but if they have done something good then it will come back to them, it does take loads of time like it takes loads of times, its exhausting. You have to devote weeks and weeks of your time to it though it is incredibly rewarding but you do need to block out that time to do it. And of course if...

The BBC or the national film institute or me or someone else gives you loads of money, so you don't need to go to the crowd, or don't need to try crowd funding. Then obviously that's going to save you time but its unlikely in most cases, especially new and first time filmmakers. So just to move onto crowd sourcing quickly as I said this is the idea to get the crowd to help you do it. It's the idea that the crowd gives you, maybe footage or maybe gives you a place to record voice-overs or gives you a editing suite. Or they give you research material I mean they, it's basically anything no monetary and I'm just going to tell you about *Indie Game: The Movie* so. Yes this is it, just checking I've got the right thing.

Indie Game: The Movie, this played at various festivals in 2012 and it was made by first-time filmmakers. And it was a film about video games about video game makers and the, where are they. The filmmakers, they didn't have a traditional documentary network around them. But what they did have was a lot of good will from the video games community - that was the world that they were from. So as soon as they started thinking about this film, the casting, the video game developers they were making it about. They were like, immediately we are going to involve the video game world.

So they went to them and they were like do you think we should make this film? What developers are out there that we could put in this film? You know

when do you think this film should be released? They went to them very early on and said we are making this film we want you to be apart of this journey. And they did I think 3 different crowd funding campaigns. But that's not the most interesting thing about this, the most interesting thing was when they finished the film and they got accepted into Sundance. It's a very good film, it's a very accessible film, they were offered lots of different deals but lots of different distributors, agents were interested. I don't think any broadcasters wanted to take it. But there was a lot of interest and there were a lot of really big deals. They turned everything down because they new if they took the money from a traditional distributor then it wouldn't be released for months and months. And all the people who had contributed ideas to the film, contributed money to the film and supported them along the way probably wouldn't be able to see it. You know 9 months or a year till it happened to come to their country in a more traditional distribution model. So given that their community, their crowd was very tech savvy people, they knew that as soon as it was available in the world. It would be put up on bittorrent and people would just download it illegally. So they said we have to get this out as quickly a possible and that's what they did they, there is a big, I'm not going to have enough time to go over it. But they did something that, if you go to Indie game: The movie.com you'll see this but they did a big case study of what they did. And they self released it.

They put it out on, through VHX which is a self distribution platform, I might just show that to you actually. See if it works - yeah here you go - so they put it, they released it on this basically a online tool for self distribution. So it's a little player, you can embed it on your website. And then people can buy the film through your website without having to go through a third party and then you get the data on who's watched the film, where they are, you get to build a mailing list as well as get a little bit of money. They co-released it on VHX and Steam (the self-distribution platform for video games) because that's where that community was. And it was incredibly successful and that meant that they could negotiate a deal with iTunes on their own terms.

So then they went to an aggregator who helped them get onto iTunes, they got a much better deal with iTunes than anyone would normally get. And it became one of the most successful documentary releases that has ever been and they did it entirely on their own terms. That’s meant that now that they are making their next film, they are getting more traditional offers from broadcasters, other funders but they are able to negotiate a split of rights. They keep some of the rights so they can self distribute it online as well as getting some of the traditional broadcast deals. If you look at their case study they keep updating it and there is loads of information up there.

This is displaying so badly, the other crowd-sourcing example I want to talk about is Spanner Films, which is Franny Armstrong’s production company. I think they put this up, yeah here we go. So *The Age of Stupid* was made probably like, it was probably like 5 years ago now, it might even be more actually. And this is a climate change film, and all of the films that Franny Armstrong has made have been made over a really long period, because she always does it really independently and in this case she would always hand out regular messages saying, things like: “We need a team brainstorm meeting. Does anyone have a cottage, a remote cottage that we can stay in for a weekend?” And have a brainstorming meeting and people would reply to her and say – yes, I have a cottage in Wales, you can stay there.

You know things that just go way beyond the fact that there is crowd funded and crowd distributed to 61 million people. Everything like the editing studio, the sound equipment, lighting equipment, sound studios. Loads of their resources were donated to them by people in the crowd who were, who wanted to support them with the material resources they had. And this is what Franny is doing in all of her films, now here we go. This is her new film which is set as a drama. About undercover policing, so those of you not from the UK might not know that there has been a big scandal about undercover police who have infiltrated themselves into a peaceful protest group for years and have done terrible things. And so they’re doing a very expensive drama about. Like a high end drama based on this police story, it’s kind of part drama, part documentary and they are again using the crowd. In quite an incredible way,

in sending out messages, they're not doing a crowd funding campaign because they need too much money. They're sending out messages saying does anyone know, basically does anyone know rich people does anyone know someone who could give us £100,000 or does anyone know anyone who is from an investment bank.

You know and things like that and it's actually worked for them they've actually been getting people reading their email and getting back to them and saying. "My brother in law runs an ethical investment company and he could get you £250,000 from a team of investors" - it's quite incredible! You know it's quite an incredible thing, so they are that network that they built up is quite an amazing thing.

So just as a final thing about where to find the crowd whether crowd funding or crowd sourcing or just something to motivate them.

They're in these places, the kind of traditional online video platforms, call them traditional as they have been around for about 5 years, YouTube and Vimeo are obviously good because you can get millions of people who can watch videos. And it's easy to be found on there, it's all about algorithms it's all about related content, the only downside to platforms like that are that you don't get the data on who's watched your video...

So you don't get to find out who the 2 million people are that watched your video. You only know that it's 2 million people. And then you have things like us at the Guardian, Vice and the New York Times, Spiegel TV in Germany and there's loads of other ones. Who are really good because you get the kind of kudos and the reputation of being associated with a big media company and you also still get big numbers. And then you have things like VHX which I showed you earlier and Distrify which is another self distribution platform. And these are really good things for your students to try because you get the data on who's watched your film. If you're wanting to build up a mailing list and you're wanting to build up your crowd. They're really great

because you get a list of, you get the names and the emails and the territories of the 5,000 people that watched your doc.

And these are the kind of lessons that I want to kind of leave you with. That your students and new film makers generally need to be thinking right from the start about how they are going to fund, release and market their docs. They can't just be thinking about the creative side, they can't think of themselves as auteurs or purely in artistic terms. They need to think about the business of it, and they need to think how they will survive entrepreneurially in this world of the crowd. And they need to think about it right from the start.

They need to think about who is going to care about it, the crowd, who are their audience. Who are going to be their collaborators, why would someone want to help you with your doc? Because probably, they might watch it and they might help you, because they think its great for art's sake. But in reality they are probably going to be interested because they like you or they like the cause or they like the campaign. Or they like the message you know whatever, it's something they need to think about.

And they need to embrace online as they key space, for getting audience and awareness they shouldn't be thinking about TV first. They shouldn't be thinking about cinema first. To be honest it's completely unrealistic, online is going to be their space for getting seen and for building awareness for them and for their career. And that's the thing they should be thinking about first before anything else and they need to understand, that's what I just said basically. To understand all of these platforms and they need to know how to get onto the Guardian or Netflix or Vimeo. This is you know, I'm at The Guardian and I'm very approachable so they can approach me. But equally how do you get to the main choice on the front page of Vimeo? For example, I mean I can tell you, you just send an email to the UK head of Vimeo and say here is my film on Vimeo, it's really good - would you put it on the front page?

They might say no, but actually if you have the chutzpah to try that then it can work. So they need to know how to do things like that, oh I thought I had

another screen but I obviously don't. So that's the kind of, I'm just going to finish with that thought basically that it is, to be successful in the documentary industry and a new film maker. It's so important that your students understand that online is the key platform for understanding your audience, and it is an absolutely gigantic audience and even though its not 114,000,000 people. If they have their doc on the Guardian for example its almost guaranteed that they will get probably around 100,000 viewers and that is more like, it's unlikely that as a first time film maker you would be able to get on TV or any other platform at all but to be able to get onto somewhere like the Guardian to get that audience at a early stage in their career. It is an incredibly good opportunity to taking the first step to build the audience, to build the crowd around them so yeah.

That was a lot of information for you - I know we are not doing questions now, are we? Ok so I can answer stuff later, but I hope that's been useful and thank you.

[ends]