

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

HOW YOUTUBE IS GIVING POWER TO THE PEOPLE



“These are just kids. These are just kids that were just making stuff up as they go along... You’re watching, like, the younger generation take over... watching the changing of the guard.” Josh Taylor- writer, director, and editor for the YouTube channel Blimey Cow- told me via his pixelated webcam image. In our Skype interview, he was referring to the new generation of filmmakers that have employed YouTube to catapult careers and reach celebrity status. We were about forty minutes

into our somewhat rambling discussion about YouTube content creation, crowd-funding, and audience-creator relationships.

I am one of the approximately three hundred thousand people who subscribe to the Nashville, Tennessee based comedy group, Blimey Cow. Fifty other YouTube channels join them on my personal list of subscriptions. As I looked through this list of my subscriptions, I noticed that most of the people who run the YouTube channels are in their mid-30s or younger.

Josh Taylor was right, these are just kids. Kids who are finding ways to make six-figures a year.

Although, Josh Taylor would humbly proclaim that he is not one of those high-paying YouTubers. The Blimey Cow team- consisting primarily of Josh, his wife Kelli Taylor, and his brother Jordan Taylor- are just beginning to turn a profit on their whimsical yet socially conscious videos. After years of on-and-off again content creation, the Taylors truly began their career as YouTubers in the summer of 2011. One night Josh called a meeting with Jordan, to decide if he should seriously pursue YouTube as a career. Jordan suggested the idea to do a show called “Messy Mondays” with the commitment of releasing a new video every Monday. And that’s what they did. And continue to do, every Monday.

In January of 2012, Blimey Cow released a Messy Mondays episode called “Seven Lies About Homeschool-



ers.” Unexpectedly, the video garnered over a million views, and Blimey Cow suddenly had tens of thousands of subscribers. According to Josh Taylor, they’ve been riding that wave ever since. He credits the popularity of the video to the surprisingly large circle of homeschoolers who kept passing the video onto others. He also credits their continued success to their unique voice as creators and audience response to their choice of topics.

Still somewhat sleepy-eyed behind his black-rimmed glasses, Josh explained that Blimey Cow’s videos contain a “...homeschool brand of humor that comes from...kids that grew up in... a church-going family. And now we have, like, this unique perspective on things. Not really from the outside looking in but...from the inside kind of like poking fun- I don’t really know how to explain it.” The broad range of topics in Blimey Cow videos make them incredibly accessible to not just the homeschooler, or the Christian, but almost any modern day internet user. As I spoke with Josh Taylor, I began to realize that two aspects of his videos have helped Blimey Cow succeed.

First, Josh Taylor enjoys exploring topics that would potentially polarize his audience. He enjoys the challenge of being “offensive in a good way,” saying “In the same way you trust us to...entertain you, we trust you to come to the right conclusions about things... and if those opinions are different from ours, not the end of the world.” Secondly, if one watches the credits at the end of each Messy Mondays episode, you will see “The Blimey Cow Creative Team” or “The Awesome

Cowmunity” in the list of names. Other times, the writing credits will belong to a list of four or more people. This is Josh’s effort to credit the pool of people who often contribute tidbit ideas or jokes to the show. Before writing, he consults family, friends, and even social media for inspiration. This community-based writing approach gives Blimey Cow’s videos an incredibly relatable quality.

These two creative factors have made Blimey Cow a success with their growing online audience. But the filmmaking family is only just beginning to turn Blimey Cow into a monetary success. “Nobody works for three years on something that they’re not passionate about if they’re not making money doing it.” Josh described the feeling of gratification that comes with finally turning his passion project into a functioning business. Blimey Cow has had videos sponsored by Audible (an Amazon.com Company), and even Treveca Nazarene University (Jordan’s Alma Mater). Some would consider the sponsoring of YouTube episodes a form of “selling out,” but Josh explained to me that they have turned down potential sponsors because they didn’t want to promote a product they personally didn’t support. If the growing trend continues, Josh predicts that within the next year Blimey Cow will be his full-time job.

Not only are Blimey Cow episodes sponsored by different companies, they are sponsored by individuals. Using a new crowd-sourcing website called Patreon, whose slogan is “Empowering a New Generation of Content Creators,” this site allows everyday people to



become “patrons” of media makers. A patron names their price and maximum monthly payment, to monetarily tip creators every time new content is released. As an incentive, creators give special perks to patrons. For Blimey Cow, one of their perks includes access to a secret Facebook group where Josh and patrons discuss ideas and jokes for upcoming episodes. It is websites like this that are closing the gap between audience and creator, all the while, removing the need for looming studio producers.

Throughout the interview, Josh Taylor repeatedly mentioned past conversations with YouTuber friend, Kevin McCreary. Soon enough, Josh Taylor had put me in contact with him also. The next day, I found myself answering a Skype voice call from Kevin McCreary. During our conversation, I found out that Taylor and McCreary met during the 25th anniversary celebration of Focus on the Family’s children radio serial, *Adventures in Odyssey*. And he joked, “we’ve been in love ever since.”

For the past six months, Kevin McCreary has been regularly releasing videos on his channel Say Goodnight Kevin. On the side, McCreary still does post-production work on the audio track for Blimey Cow’s weekly videos. If that’s not enough, he hosts a podcast with Josh Taylor about content creation called *The InnerTube Show*. With a consistently bouncy tone in his voice, Kevin McCreary described to me how he decided to produce YouTube videos, “[I] took everything that I’ve learned in production, in writing, in comedy...all that stuff. Took everything that I’ve learned so far...[and] was like, alright... if I start something new, [how] would I do it? And then did it.” Much like the Taylors, he made a very conscious effort to pursue YouTube.

McCreary’s videos take a similar approach as Blimey Cow’s *Messy Mondays*, but his are different due to the very nature of his personality. Although his content often bears BuzzFeed-worthy names like, “Five Movies I’m Not Supposed to Like” and “How to Get a Boy/Girl to Like You” the actual content of his videos is far from superficial internet lists. Instead, McCreary uses *Say Goodnight Kevin* to discuss very real topics in internet-friendly ways. In our talk, he told me about his personal discussions in his videos, “...so far people have been, like, very responsive to me just telling a story about my own life, or just stating my own personal conclusions.” And that is what makes his content unique. Just as Blimey Cow is based in Josh Taylor’s Christian homeschooled personality, *Say Goodnight Kevin* reflects the accumulation of McCreary’s professional creative skills and his past experiences in life. In an age of digital dating and spin doctors, both YouTubers remain authentic.

So far, people recognize this authenticity. Kevin McCreary is already receiving sponsorship through a Patreon page, and is



growing a group of regular viewers. He will openly acknowledge that none of his videos have hit “viral” status. Yet his occasionally squeaky voice gave away no sense of worry when talking about his video view numbers. He likened his expanding audience to growing trees, saying, “...the trees that grow slowly, like the redwoods, are the harder woods... Where a tree that grows really fast, like pine, grows really fast so it’s a very soft wood. And...if I’m growing slowly, it means that... people don’t like my videos or it means that they’re part of more than just a click but they’re part of a community.”

Just like the Blimey Cow “cowmunity,” Kevin McCreary is building a relationship with his audience that only the internet could provide. He has even addressed his fan-celebrity relationship in his episode, “5 Tips for Being a YouTube Fan.” In the video he states, “...I think the line between fan and creator has kind of blurred...sometimes it’s hard to know like what is faux-pas and what is not. And what does the word “faux-pas” mean?” He then goes on to list five etiquette tips for being a fan of a YouTuber.

This is a topic that is important to Kevin McCreary as he found much of his past experience came from both admiring and working with creators, like Focus on the Family and Blimey Cow. But McCreary is also aware of the dangerous side to this new fan-creator relationship dynamic. “....people...feel like they have access to celebrities... because they have Twitter and they can just tweet anybody... there’s an entitlement mentality,” he told me when discussing the topic.

But Kevin is glad to see that most people don’t abuse their fan power. He described how

fans easily voicing their opinions is altering his video creation. “I think we’re kind of in an age where everyone is in some way a content creator. If it’s just making a Twitter or Facebook status. And that can be real negative... But it also can be positive... everyone in some way should be conscious of the fact that what they have to say is kind of going out there to be seen. And possibly used against them in a court of law... Recognizing that for me and then making my videos, knowing my audience... makes my videos... an open dialogue...”

Josh Taylor is also seeing the affects of the new power YouTube and other sites have given the average viewer. He sees how the viewer often becomes creator, that people are making high-quality content for less money than ever. Just as he is experiencing, people are beginning to find ways to fund their content without money from large studios. “You’re kind of like watching the changing of the guard... And you just hope and pray that it happens responsibly.”

Because the internet has empowered the layman to create media independently, Taylor believes that our current time is revolutionary for filmmakers and other creators. “I think that in hundreds of years... people will still be analyzing the importance of YouTube.” He even went on to compare this time to icon of counter-culture, Woodstock. In the future, grandkids will ask their grandparents about the monumental rise of YouTube and how it changed society. “It’s cool man. I don’t think we realize what... a revolutionary time we live in.”

Although I conducted my interviews with Josh Taylor and Kevin McCreary on different days, I felt as though much of what they said was part of a larger dialogue. They are young, creative, and passionate media makers

who are not only utilizing the internet to share their work with others, but to create a conversation. Neither of their videos tell people what to think; instead both YouTubers draw from their lives to simply explain their views on various topics. Both have opened the floor for their audience- to inspire others and be inspired by others.

Toward the end of our conversation, Kevin McCreary described his experience with Patreon saying, “[His patrons] feel a sense of... being a part of something they believe in. And I feel a sense of gratitude for receiving even the smallest amount. It’s not just a number. It’s a face. And...a part of a community.”

I said, “If more creators took that approach to... how they received payment, things would be a lot different.”

Kevin replied with a sense of cartoonish awe in his voice, “Yeah...I guess they would.”



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A BRIEF TIMELINE OF INTERNET VIDEOS

February 2005

YouTube Launches



April 2009

First YouTube Channel Hits
1,000,000,000 Subscribers

January 2012

Blimey Cow Releases
“Seven Lies About Homeschoolers”



January 2014

Say Goodnight Kevin Launches

