

film Inquiry Submission No.!!.....
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TO: House of Representatives' Standing Committee on
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

In reference to:

Post-Production Research & Development for Film, Television and Digital
Media

A Briefing re. the National Integration of Research and Development for an
Emerging Cultural and Commercial Strength in Sydney and New South
Wales.

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28 - 05 - 03

The State Governments of Victoria and Queensland have both recently made real contributions to the development of 'creative clusters' or productive communities specialising in **digital design**.

(See <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse?SIMID=g2rs6ldk16zez> for reference to the establishment of the RMIT 'Digital Design Centre'.

See <http://www.creativeindustries.qut.edu.au/news/news-event.jsp?news-event-id=1022> for information re the new CRC in Interaction Design)

The strength of this strategy lies in the way the Queensland and Victorian State Governments have set up training and content-development funds whilst also establishing some broadband connectivity within creative precincts.

For example, the Queensland Government has supported the establishment of the Creative Industries Precinct and Faculty at QUT in downtown Brisbane. The Queensland Government has also funded (in linkage with the Australian Research Council) a comprehensive mapping-study of all 'creative industries' in Queensland. From this environment, the CRC in Interaction Design has arisen. It should be noted also that the existence of the CRC for Distributed Systems Technology (with major nodes in Brisbane and Sydney) is an important potential partner in this emerging culture.

In Victoria, the State Government is in its seventh year of support for Multimedia Victoria, which funds training and content-development for digital culture and design, with a new emphasis on interactive game development having been announced recently.

Therefore, in both states, there is buoyancy and optimism in the field of design, broadly defined, and in digital design, more precisely focussed.

To follow on from this important work, a national strategy needs to be coordinated, one which nurtures the specific strengths in 'sub-sets' of design that are already emerging in various locales. For 'design' is an extremely broad and evermore atomising field of industrial and cultural endeavour. Having said this, the Victorian Government's involvement in the computer games industry seems particularly savvy and indicates that they have made a strategic decision about a perceived local strength.

In New South Wales, the State Government has been relatively hands-off in terms of guiding or stimulating the multimedia, digital/graphics and postproduction industries. The NSW Government has preferred to let the market determine its own directions and developments. However, there is clear evidence that a special 'area of strength' has begun to emerge in NSW, and particularly in Sydney: postproduction facilities and services all networked together to deliver computer-generated effects and graphics for feature films and television. This is an area

which, if wisely supported at the level of planned and systematic Research & Development, could see Sydney become a world leader and a major employer.

With outstanding companies such as Animal Logic working out of Fox Studios and with several smaller post-production bureaux around Sydney finding significant work on 'flagship' Hollywood feature films, activity in digital postproduction for film and television has attained a certain 'critical mass' in Sydney. There is impressive expertise in the local industry, and a culture is poised to emerge wherein great technical and conceptual advances could be made in new software, hardware and content-sets for digital post-production. Add to this the fact that time-zone scheduling places Australia very advantageously to work in day/night rhythms with both the US and the European production sectors, and it is plain that great opportunities exist if the right industrial scale and inventiveness can be attained. Furthermore, the universities in the Sydney region have high-level research expertise in the area of digital design and interactivity applications. For example UTS has a designated Emerging Field of New Media & Digital Culture, which entails the development and coordination of a bold range of curricular and research projects involving several dedicated professorial staff.

The problem, however, is that the commercial companies involved are still caught in a 'cottage industry' pattern of production: they tend to throw all energy into delivering an existing project in order to secure just enough surplus to tide them over till they win the next big commission. They have not managed to attain the economies of scale that allow leeway in logistics, scheduling and budgeting so that they can apply a significant portion of staff and time to venturesome R&D. This is a common problem in an economy the size of Australia's.

If government and the tertiary sector were able to establish a scheme wherein companies such as Animal Logic and others could develop 'blue-sky' research in a 'federated' and networked laboratory context (sharing Intellectual Property with all collaborators involved – the MIT Medialab model), it is likely that the entire digital post-production economy of NSW could rapidly expand to a new level of

productivity and international influence. This would in turn 'plug into' the 'grid' of other local expertise concentrations such as Victoria's concentration on interactive games and Queensland's interaction design. Moreover all these clusters of expertise could be beneficially connected through dedicated R&D broadband systems such as Grange_Net.

An industry such as digital post-production is exactly the kind of knowledge-economy activity that is required by a burgeoning 'world city'. The personnel, the infrastructure, the know-how all exist in Sydney at present. What is needed is the latitude in which to speculate and produce new ideas, new technical systems, softwares and content-sets. With such support, the industry and its supporting culture might expand emphatically, quickly and profitably.

UTS submits that the R&D aspect of the burgeoning digital postproduction industry needs to be fostered through the establishment of a nationally integrated, a high-concept digital laboratory that is available to all sectors – industrial, academic, cultural, governmental – who are currently engaged in aspects of digital postproduction in the Sydney region. Moreover, the Sydney facility needs to be a national facility, operating on a broadband distributed network connected through CRCs and universities around Australia. Such extensive integration will encourage the 'quantum leap' from the current state of emerging capability to the promising state of expanded expertise and critical mass of facilities and activities.