

Creative use



Image: Slow Service - Marcus Lyall

video payout

Each screen maintains a core output of selected live television (BBC channels) and a localised, repeat package of video payout. Timings vary, but schedules are unique to each site and typically formed of content submitted via schools, colleges, amateur and professional filmmakers, galleries, museums, short film collectives, creative agencies, artists, touring initiatives, selected local government and civic information clips. Not all material is regional: both national and international submissions are welcome, while highlights are toured at the discretion of the network. Content that has been created with outdoor broadcast and/or the site specific nature of each screen in mind is encouraged and has proven popular with audiences.



live relay

The broadcast of a video feed from the vicinity of each screen allows us to integrate live activities. Portable camera(s) can be located at the base of each structure for staged/roaming activities, while a fixed camera located on the top of each structure* provides an elevated viewpoint. Selected sites have additional live inject points both indoors and across the city, but the network is not uniform in this regard. Some screens are piloting live images via broadband. Microwave camera transmission has in the past appeared patchy at best, while satellite relay - prohibitive for most - is used for our annual Summer link-up from the Royal Opera House. * please contact individual screens for relay facilities



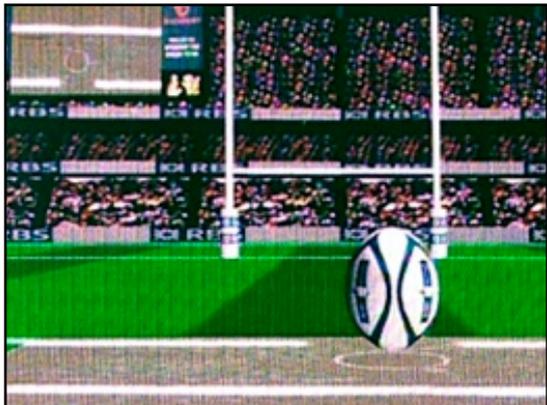
participatory hub

As points of focal interest, one means of use for the screens is as a location whereby the public might participate and/or contribute to a live or even delayed event. In a very simple sense, this might involve a roadshow such as in the featured image. Here a troupe of performance hairdressers transformed volunteers into cartoonish creations, appearing live on screen from the base. Another project used a screen as a processing point for an artist to take still images of the public in posed positions, later splicing these together to form a staggered 'dance' that was transmitted to participants within that space; granting a rare opportunity to directly engage with the built environment.



screen camera

Most sites include a screen-based 360 degree controllable camera with tilt, pan and zoom facilities, accessed via a web-based interface. Direct camera feed can be automated to appear on screen or manually controlled. The UK Data Protection Act means that sensitivities regarding right to privacy must quite rightly be respected, and so no covert usage is allowed. Instead, text or audio alerts are conveyed when in operation, although the area of view can be modified to suit. The public can then choose to step into or avoid this patch as they so choose. The screen camera is often incorporated into interactive, movement-based software applications.



software application

If a software project or application can run on a computer, then it can appear on the screens. We have a dedicated PC and Mac at each site on which material might sit for just this purpose. The output from these can be manually operated during a live event or automated to appear at specific times. Past projects have included collaborations with the likes of ICDC: International Centre for Digital Content, who created a programme of sports-related games that utilised our on-screen cameras. These included interactive rugby, football, tennis and Formula 1. Other examples include a Visual Jukebox, for which the public selected content via movement alone (see *Screen camera*).



matrix

The screen matrix is the hardware and related software controls by which the screen manager might programme a schedule in advance. This might include BBC television, live cameras within the area, additional computer material, DVD playout and other options cabled into the system on a permanent or temporary basis. Although relatively standard, some startling results can be achieved. One project baffled and delighted viewers by first switching to live camera, cutting to a pre-recorded DVD feed from the same source (inserting bizarre occurrences into the public space), and cutting again to the artist's own time-delay unit so that observers then saw themselves arriving.



media partners

Public Space Broadcasting is but a relatively recent addition to the remit of the BBC in serving the UK public; an institution already entrenched in television and radio broadcasting, now joined by a successful online portfolio. The wealth of enthusiasm and experience from within our organisation, coupled with a desire to maximise outreach possibilities, means that selected projects (both internal and via collaboration with external partners) are further enhanced through cross-platform support. These have taken the form of touring roadshows, outside broadcasts, workshops and additional participation within BBC Open Centres and onboard the fleet of BBC Community Buses.



bluetooth/text

As we continue to encourage a responsive audience relationship with the screens, SMS texting continues to offer a simple solution in this sense. All submissions must be moderated for suitability. The natural successor to this technology has been Bluetooth, enabling picture messages to be sent direct to the screen/s from the immediate locality. A bespoke system is now in operation at select sites during pre-arranged events, allowing those with Bluetooth-enabled phones to recognise the screen as a recipient hub. No charge is made for the exchange of images which, like text, must be moderated in real time. It is our experience that this facility works best when many are gathered for an event and/or appointment-to-view.



here + now

As the screens are sited in key areas of town and city centres, often within an open plaza of sorts, there are performances, demonstrations and attractions that would take place in these zones regardless. Wherever possible we try to enhance these in any way that we can, often involving a straight-forward live video link. Not only that, but many grassroots community and special interest groups (eg. history societies, choirs and drama clubs) without the funds to involve larger audiences approach us with a view to facilitating a lo-fi pavement link-up. These instances might not be complex or involve huge audiences, but they are no less successful for holding up a giant magnifying glass.



plug 'n play

This refers to an access box, usually outdoors, in the form of a discreet weatherproof unit. Most screens have at least one at the base of the structure, while others have one or more additional units distributed across the city. Cameras, laptop computers or other forms of video/image generating equipment can plug directly into these in order to appear live on the screen. The requisite outputs are x1 BNC composite video and x2 XLR audio connections. Laptops and other forms of pre-approved hardware able to connect in this way have also been used by VJs during music showcases, as have more conventional home console gaming units.



dynamic layout

During default operation, the screen is split into a number of dynamic windows forming a standard layout. New interpretations can be created for thematic use. A screen layout may be a simple single window showing full screen live or .mpg video, or it may be composed of multiple windows up to a maximum of six, each of which may be sized and positioned over the background image. Separate windows may be created to show time and/ or date, static text, tickertape or video. Windows may be overlaid with a priority to determine which window lies on top and which lies underneath. Likewise, a layout can be as no-frills as full-screen video, with or without scrolling descriptive text.



your idea here

Methods of creative application outlined in this document are by no means the only options available, but rather those that we have attempted to date. We actively welcome ideas, partnerships and pitches for imaginative use that will engage the public while we in return offer the perfect platform, facilitation between city partners and no charge for use. To kick-start some thoughts, we've been dreaming of pavement democracy, common hand-held devices used to communicate with screens, two-way exchange of material, schemes relating to a sense of place, web-based content, simultaneous relay across the entire network and oh, so much more. So join us, let's see if we can make it happen...