

# TV documentaries take leap into digital world

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People visit the 46th annual MIPTV trade show in Cannes, southern France. TV documentaries are fast forwarding into the digital future to tap new sources of revenue, offering interactive and "360" packages to audiences increasingly getting their television fix online.

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As well as using new online virtual worlds and video games, programme-makers are also turning to web games, DVDs and even iTunes to generate extra revenue, producers said at this year's MIPDOC documentary show held on the eve of the four-day MIPTV entertainment trade show that opened Monday.

"The current treatment of documentary subject matter is a quickly shifting world," Canada's award-winning producer, director and writer Robert Lang, told AFP.

"Kids no longer make appointments with TV, they're more interested in interacting in the online sphere," he said. "Therefore, to communicate documentary material to them, you need to use a multi-platform and cross-platform approach."

TV interactivity currently is being rolled out across four continents, with Australia, Britain, Canada and the Scandinavian countries trailblazing on the scene. And adults are increasingly following children into online media entertainment spaces, experts said here.

Factual programmes have enjoyed increased popularity in recent years with the rise of easy-to-watch docudramas that bring major historical events to life and major box office movies, ever since Michael Moore's Oscar-winning "Fahrenheit 9/11".

And the appetite for documentaries on everything from social and environmental issues through nature and wildlife, to science and knowledge and personal viewpoints, shows no sign of letting up, with programme buying brisk at this year's MIPDOC.

"It's taken a long time in coming but having watched audiences disappear onto the online space, broadcasters are now taking the interactive documentary space very seriously," said Heather Croall, festival director of Britain's Sheffield Docfest.

Some major TV broadcasters, led by heavyweights like the BBC, National Geographic, Discovery and Japan's NHK, are also pioneering a new "360-degree" approach -- generating income from popular factual series through sales of books, online and mobile phone games, and even

live shows.

National Geographic recently enjoyed great success with a video game offshoot of the "Herod's Tomb" series, which became one of the top 10 downloaded Internet games in 2008.

Independent producer Robert Lang's three-part Gemini Award-winning series, "Diamond Road", broadcast by TVOntario, Discovery Times, ZDF/ARTE and SBS Australia, is an example of what can be achieved in the digital space.

Lang's accompanying site to the series, "Diamond Road Online", enables users to become an "editor of the story landscape by creating, commenting on and sharing content sequences".

And the interactive website of another factual series co-directed by Lang, "The Sacred Balance", offers users webcasts, games and other rich media content, generating an international online community of thousands.

But the upcoming though somewhat unlikely next digital space for documentaries may be the [virtual world](#).

Cutting-edge documentary producer Nonny De La Pena linked up with US professor Peggy Weil to create a virtual accessible version of Guantanamo Bay in the avatar-inhabited 3D online world of Second Life.

"Gone Gitmo", enabling visitors to walk the immersive experience of military detention, has attracted millions of visitors and sometimes violent reactions from users, De La Pena said

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