



The community media sector is not the amateur cousin of broadcasting that it is perceived to be by the wider media industry.

This argument will focus on the moving image media industries primarily, such as television and film, but will reference radio and print media where relevant.

I used to work in broadcast television at HTV West, both in a community and programme making capacity. During this time I was best placed to see the differences between how community media projects and the broadcast departments were perceived and prioritised. My community role was to set-up and run the '*technical workshop*', which was a weekly club aimed at 13-16 years olds, to give them access to video equipment and production support to enable them to make their own short films and documentaries. That was my main job role – *HTV Technical Workshop Leader*. My secondary but growing role was directing and producing documentaries for the HTV, and programme idea development. In the first instance this involved developing ways the '*workshoppers*' ideas and new skills could reach the screen, and this evolved into me writing, directing and producing programmes for broadcast outside of the workshop agenda altogether, making programmes for a number of different HTV departments. All this happened still in the shadow of me leaving film school vowing I never wanted to work in television.

Working within the structure of a broadcast station, whose obvious priority was making programmes, of course it was quite understandable in that context to accept that I would be pushing against the natural flow of that institution, as my priorities wouldn't always be theirs. The hierarchies the workshop were up against in that institution were at times frustrating, but not entirely a surprise as broadcasting was its priority focus, and that relationship understood even if we weren't always satisfied with our *lower* position in the business plan.

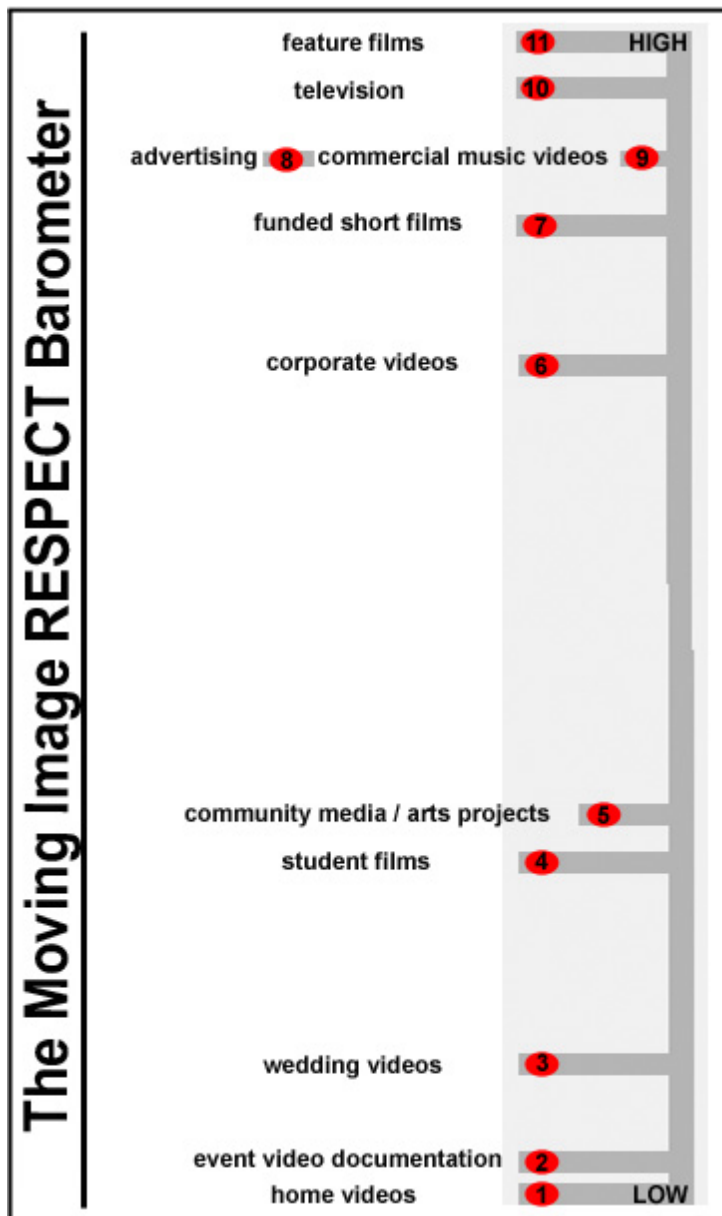
As the *workshop leader* I always received CVs and phone calls from media practitioners and recent graduates offering their expertise, and asking for support roles in the various workshop productions. When additional support was required, I soon realised I had to make a judgement on the interested person's agenda, asking myself three main questions:

- Did they want to get involved working with the workshop to further their own career in television broadcasting, and see this as the first step into the corridors of HTV?
- Did they want to get involved working with the workshop to further their own career in television broadcasting, but also have a genuine interest in working creatively with young people?
- Did they have a genuine interest in working creatively with young people, regardless of the HTV connection?

When interviewing, I would sigh internally whenever the interviewee asked what the possibilities were of working with other departments and making programmes. I would try not to feel hurt and trodden on, when treated like the lowest rung of the broadcasting stepladder. I must stress however that this attitude rarely presented itself in the form of professional snobbery or patronising rudeness, but more as a given assumption that “of course” broadcasting was more important, without even the faintest glimmer that this would, or could, ever be questioned.

There are two interesting issues that this scenario unearths; one is of priority reasons for reasons for getting involved in community focus work, and the other is the perceived pinnacle of the moving image industry; namely television and feature films. To understand my argument that community media is not an amateur sector or pursuit, we need to make the distinction between the notions of priority and professional, as too often they go confused and taken for granted.

In crude terms, the moving image hierarchy from within looks a little like this:



This diagram is not based on economic importance, or influence, but rather draws on the generalised preconceptions, prejudices and expectations of production quality and professionalism within the media sector.

This diagram also highlights how the media industries have skewed the traditional high art/low art concepts and boundaries in its own way.

To understand this diagram better, imagine you work for one of the sectors listed in the above barometer, and you all had the same budget. The order it appears may be where you might find yourself in a list if a hire company (for example) had to place you in orders of priority and importance. For the career minded media traditionalist, the further you are up this ladder, the more successful and professional in moving image industry you are considered to be. Of course this diagram is not water-tight and is a mere generalisation. Weddings are no doubt important and treated as a high priority event, and wedding video producers are professional as they can comfortably make a living from this work, but the fact remains that they are looked down on and not taken very seriously by the wider media sector.

My own personal journey along this barometer has been ~~4-5-7-10-7-10-5~~.

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