

Digital Shift Project Final Report

December 2014

Between April and October 2014, ELAN's Digital Shift project surveyed artists, arts organizations, publicists and journalists, and then hosted two focus group sessions, to create a report with recommendations to help artists, arts organizations and their audiences adapt to the digital shift from old media to new media.

Project Manager: Richard Burnett

Volunteer Consultant: Mitch Joel

ELAN Staff: Guy Rodgers, Amy Macdonald



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Executive Summary

1. The Digital Shift project was created to help Quebec's English-language artists and arts organizations adapt to the digital shift from old media to new media.
2. **Three surveys** were created in May 2014 and distributed in June to gauge how artists and arts organizations (1), publicists (2) and journalists (3) have been dealing with this digital shift.
3. **The survey of artists and arts organizations** reports that respondents are having trouble adapting to new media and social media, and keeping up with the promotional demands these media involve. Traditional media, however, are still valued as sources of coverage, and there remain significant portions of target audiences that are not reachable on social media. Almost 79% of survey respondents said they would actively help promote a very good event listings platform. Over 80% agreed their ideal platform would include both independent and mainstream events, as well as being bilingual (62%) or multilingual (28%).
4. **The survey of publicists** shows that respondents believe artists and arts organizations need to develop skills to adapt to new media and social media. Yet publicists also value coverage by traditional outlets, especially daily print newspapers. Most respondents feel they are working harder to get their clients the same amount of coverage compared to five years ago. Almost 81% said they would actively help promote a very good listings platform, and 97% agreed their ideal platform would include both independent and mainstream events, as well as being bilingual (63%) or multilingual (31%).
5. **The survey of journalists** confirms that artists and arts organizations could be increasing their presence on social media and engaging publicists to get more coverage. Though this survey had the fewest overall respondents (12), most (80% of those who answered the question) said they would actively help promote a very good listings platform, and all agreed their ideal platform would include both independent and mainstream events, though comparatively fewer felt it should be bilingual (60%) and 30% felt it should be English only.
6. **Two focus group sessions** July and August 2014 brought together a broad spectrum of artists and arts organizations from all artistic disciplines, as well as publicists, journalists, and a digital marketing specialist. Both focus groups agreed artists and arts organizations need to develop skills to adapt to new media and social media. Many participants said they would welcome a user-friendly web platform to boost visibility and attendance. Models were discussed that would combine comprehensive bilingual artistic/cultural event listings, arts and culture news stories aggregated from other websites, and/or a blogroll of links to arts coverage on other websites. However, participants recognized that first creating a truly comprehensive and high-quality platform, and then ensuring its success, would be a difficult, complicated, and possibly very expensive undertaking.

7. At an October follow-up meeting, **Twist Image president and digital marketing specialist Mitch Joel** recommended establishing a team of developers to create a software application that would embed comprehensive listings into the websites of artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts. This application would allow those seeking listings to find them on hundreds of different websites they already visit, instead of on just one new, centralized hub.
8. **What we learned:** Participants believe the digital shift will continue to accelerate, but PR and promotional strategies to adapt to the shift have not kept pace with the changes. There seems to be some resistance to these changes as artists and arts organizations are confronted with the realization that they will have to adjust their business models. However, at the same time, social media and new media are not a panacea for finding new audiences. Old-fashioned, grassroots promotion and audience development strategies are still important. Focus group participants agreed that pooling their efforts to create solutions is the next step.
9. **Immediate outcomes:** The focus group sessions and general reactions to the surveys indicate there is a growing sense of community-building around this issue. Participants appreciated the chance to share their frustrations and insights on the digital shift and its effects on visibility, promotion, and audience development. There is solid interest in keeping these conversations going. There is also some interest in exploring possibilities to create and promote some type of user-friendly web platform as described above that would combine comprehensive bilingual listings, a blogroll and/or aggregated stories.
10. **Recommendations:**
 1. ELAN—perhaps in collaboration with YES Montreal and/or its key partners in the Digital Shift project (AELAQ, QDF, QWF and Studio 303)—should establish a **social media skills workshop** specifically tailored to the needs of English-language artists and arts organizations in Quebec. The importance of artists and arts organizations developing their social media skills, in conjunction with other promotional and audience development strategies, cannot be underestimated. Such a course should be comprehensive, rather than just a brief workshop—and could be combined with ongoing sharing of best practices and experiences.
 2. Working groups or initiatives arising out of the Digital Shift project should **proactively reach out to French-language arts and media groups** such as Culture Montréal and La Vitrine. Collaborating and learning from each other’s experiences, as well as making efforts to reach new audience bases where appropriate, will produce bilingual, inclusive and ultimately more effective solutions to problems we all share.
 3. ELAN and its partners should establish a committee to explore the possibility

of a **user-friendly web platform combining comprehensive bilingual listings, a blogroll and/or either original or aggregated editorial content.** In addition to examining the options at hand, this committee should identify potential corporate and media partners, as well as other sources of funding.

4. ELAN and its partners should explore the possibility of developing a **standardized one-stop submission form which would allow artists to submit to multiple listings services at once.** Part of this recommendation would involve identifying potential media or corporate partners to host the standardized form on an already existing web platform. Possible alternatives to establish and fund a new user-friendly web platform to host the standardized form should also be identified.

5. ELAN and its partners should apply for a grant, or identify other partners and funding sources, to create a **centralized event database linked to an application that media outlets, artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts could embed onto their own websites** in order to show those listings (either comprehensive or sorted according to their own preferences and their audience's needs). This project should also detail the next phase of development and identify corporate and media partners and sources of funding to create, establish and market the application.

Beginnings of the Digital Shift Project

The Background

The migration from print to online media has taken a toll on English-language arts and culture coverage in Montreal. The city supports only one English daily print newspaper, despite accounting for about 80.5% of Quebec's Anglophone population (Statistics Canada). With the disappearance of alternative weekly papers Hour Community and the Montreal Mirror and cuts at the CBC and Montreal Gazette, arts organizations and artists are fighting for visibility among key audience segments.

Quebec's English-language community has lost more traditional print and broadcast media than any other major city in Canada while being home to the highest percentage of artists of any official language community in Canada (Statistical profile of artists in Official Language Minority Communities: Department of Canadian Heritage Research Team, 2011). The large number of artists and the declining number of media outlets stimulated Quebec's English-speaking artists to take action on an urgent problem. In the wake of the 2012 closures of the Mirror and Hour, ELAN struck a Media Committee to examine the loss of visibility, which takes time and energy away from each organization's fulfillment of its artistic mission. Montreal's English-speaking arts community sees its vitality threatened by the increasing failure of major media to share its stories effectively with audiences.

There is a need to bridge the legitimacy of traditional media with the onslaught—even excess—of information available online for those who know where to look. This is especially true for artists' and organizations' visibility among mainstream audiences, including the older audience demographic which is less active online. As challenging as these changes have been, they also present an excellent opportunity to take collective leadership, turning the print-to-digital shift to our advantage.

The English-speaking arts community lacks local content that covers local arts, and we have seen concrete negative impacts of the decline in traditional media. Across disciplines, the adverse effects of the digital shift are magnified by strained resources and broader struggles with falling attendance. Meanwhile, digital and online media are growing rapidly in number, influence, and scope. This project was designed to move the arts community beyond commiseration and self-reflection. ELAN and its key partners sought to rally collaboration around pragmatic short-term tactics to ensure visibility for the work of our community, while pointing towards long-term strategies to navigate a media environment that is sure to keep changing.

The Project

In April 2014, ELAN hired Montreal-based freelance journalist Richard Burnett as Project Manager. A former editor with weekly magazine Hour for 16 years, Burnett was chosen because of his familiarity with local artists, publicists and journalists, and his own professional experience bridging the digital shift from old media to new media.

With the assistance of ELAN's team of Guy Rodgers and Amy Macdonald, Burnett developed three different surveys: one for artists and arts organizations in all disciplines, another for publicists, and a third for journalists. The responses were used to develop two focus group sessions, which consisted of discussions with a cross-section of journalists, publicists, artists and arts organizations with a stake in the project's outcome. The focus group sessions would explore possible solutions and produce recommendations for the final report.

This project was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts under the Leadership for Change program.

About ELAN

The English-Language Arts Network (ELAN) is a non-profit organization created as an umbrella group that represents all English-speaking artists and cultural workers in Quebec.

ELAN provides a meeting place for English-language artists and cultural workers of all disciplines from every region of Quebec, where they can share expertise and resources, build audiences and alliances, seek support, advocate for their interests, and make common cause with the Francophone arts community.

ELAN's key project partners were the Association of English-Language Publishers of Quebec (AELAQ), the Quebec Drama Federation (QDF), the Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF) and Studio 303:

Association of English-language Publishers of Quebec (AELAQ)

The mandate of the Association of English-language Publishers of Quebec is to advance the publication, distribution and promotion of English-language books from Quebec. AELAQ represents the publishing world to readers, government and organizations. It also makes visible Quebec's English-language literary arts through the publication of the Montreal Review of Books.

Quebec Drama Federation (QDF)

QDF represents and promotes English-language theatre in Quebec, advocating for the interests of this community to government, organizations and community groups. It also

supplies its membership (which includes individual artists as well as theatre companies) with professional development opportunities and career support.

Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF)

QWF represents the province's English-language writing community, with a diverse set of activities from workshops to mentorship programs to readings and other events. In addition to supporting writers in all stages of their careers, QWF celebrates and promotes their work to the public, notably through its annual literary awards.

Studio 303

Studio 303 promotes the evolution of live artistic practices, and presents and supports dance and interdisciplinary performance. In addition to programming public performances, Studio 303 offers workshops, administrative services, programming and affordable equipment and space rental. Its services are focused on nurturing independent artists through enriching exchanges.

The Plan—What We Aimed to Do

Short-term outcomes:

- Pragmatic tactics to adapt to the most pressing challenges facing the English-speaking arts community, in the form of best practices and collaborative approaches that make resourceful use of existing tools to connect artists and audiences: niche websites, listings platforms and maximizing social media.

Long-term outcomes:

- Solidified collaborative infrastructure and local knowledge network, which will set the tone for future collaboration around ongoing shifts in the media landscape.
- Next steps towards a sustainable long-term visibility strategy for local arts and culture that builds upon the tools at hand to develop a best-case solution.
- Maintained/increased coverage of local arts and culture from the English-speaking community.

Project Activities: Surveys

In May 2014, ELAN created three different surveys: one for artists and arts organizations in all disciplines, another for publicists, and a third for journalists. In June, the surveys were sent to ELAN members, partners and other interested parties. In total, there were 226 survey respondents: 168 artists and arts organizations; 46 publicists; as well as 12 arts journalists. The survey results show that people believe the shift from Old to New Media is accelerating.

All three Digital Shift surveys (see links provided below) give insight into what respondents think of their current situations, and informed the five topics that were discussed in the two focus group sessions.

Definitions of Terms

Old media: Traditional media that existed before the Internet (e.g. broadcast radio and TV such as CBC and CTV, and printed newspapers and magazines such as the Montreal Gazette and Montreal Mirror).

New media: Media that provide on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device (e.g. websites and niche blogs).

Social media: Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest and Tumblr.

Survey Summary: Artists and Arts Organizations

Complete results available on ELAN's website (PDF):

<http://tinyurl.com/digitalshiftartists>

The Digital Shift survey for artists and arts organizations was distributed to the memberships of ELAN, AELAQ, QDF and QWF. It was also sent to over 200 contacts via email and confidential social media correspondence, and advertised in ELAN's monthly email newsletter sent to over 2000 recipients. A total of 168 artists and arts organizations completed the survey.

Answering each question was optional. Since not all participants answered every question, the term "respondents" below refers only to those who answered that particular question. Also, for the sake of ease and clarity, percentages given below are rounded off to the nearest percent.

- When asked to select which types of media would ideally publish coverage of their work, respondents' top five choices were: Daily newspapers (print) - 85%,

radio (broadcast) - 74%, weekly newspapers (print) - 73%, daily newspapers (online) - 67%, and alternative publications (print) - 66%, indicating a preference for old media (see **Question 4**).

- Over 79% of respondents said their PR workload is a bit larger or much larger than it was five years ago, while 12% said it is the same, and only 9% said it is a bit smaller or much smaller (**Question 8**). And 81% of respondents see their interactive presence on social media somewhat or greatly increasing in the next five years (**Question 18**).
- One third of respondents estimated that 40% of their target audience could not be reached via social media. Twelve percent of respondents reported that 60% of their target audience could not be reached via social media (**Question 9**). When asked to name the primary obstacles to reaching their target audiences via social media, most cited the facts that older audiences are not active on social media, that the glut of information is overwhelming or too competitive, and that their reach on Facebook is shrinking as Facebook is monetizing posts (**Question 10**).
- The two most important social media platforms used to promote respondents' work are Facebook (76% choose it as their top social media platform) and Twitter (**Question 12**).
- Fifty-four percent of respondents said they spend less than three hours updating social media in a typical week, while 32% spend 4 to 7 hours (**Question 19**). About a third (38%) said they have the time and resources to maintain their presence on social media, but a much larger number, 62%, said they don't (**Question 20**).
- Most respondents (82%) said they have a website, but of those with websites, 42% said they do not regularly post news on their website, while just 29% have a regularly updated blog. Many did report, however, that media mentions, live events, and social media activity (e.g. shares, re-tweets) increase traffic on their websites (**Questions 21-26**).
- One-fifth of respondents do not use listings platforms to promote their events, while 36% use one or two platforms and 43% use three or more (**Question 30**). As for where respondents submit their event listings, four of the top five choices were old media like daily, weekly and alternative print newspapers (**Question 31**). But when asked which listings platform is the most user-friendly, few could name any web platforms, and many just didn't know where to go (**Question 32**). When asked which listings platform is most cumbersome, comments emphasized that submitting listings to existing platforms is time-consuming and frustrating (**Question 33**).
- Over 80% of respondents said both mainstream and independent events would be included on their ideal listings platform, 62% said it should be bilingual (English

and French), and an additional 28% said it should be multilingual (**Questions 34-35**). Fifty-two percent said they would pay to list their events (preferably per event) if there were one very good listings platform, while 48% would not (**Questions 36-37**). Almost 79% of respondents said they would actively help promote a very good listings platform to their audiences and networks (**Question 38**).

Survey Summary: Publicists

Complete results available on ELAN's website (PDF):

<http://tinyurl.com/digitalshiftpublicists>

The Digital Shift survey for publicists was distributed to over 100 publicists via email and confidential social media correspondence. It was also advertised in ELAN's monthly email newsletter sent to over 2000 recipients. A total of 46 publicists completed the survey.

Answering each question was optional. Since not all participants answered every question, the term "respondents" below refers only to those who answered that particular question. Also, for the sake of ease and clarity, percentages given below are rounded off to the nearest percent.

- Respondents reported that in their experience the kinds of artists and arts companies that have the most difficulty getting media coverage are by far those with small budgets (up to \$1000) and, to a lesser extent, those with medium budgets (\$1001 to \$9999). Artists and arts companies with large budgets (\$10,000 or more) had less difficulty getting media coverage (**see Question 3**).
- When asked which types of media would publish coverage of their clients' work, their top five choices were: Daily newspapers (print) – 86%, daily newspapers (online) – 81%, alternative publications (print) – 81%, weekly newspapers (online) – 75% and alternative publications (online) – 72%. TV (broadcast), radio (broadcast) and culture-focused websites also ranked very high (**Question 9**).
- Eighty-three percent of respondents reported that they are working a bit more or much more to achieve the same level of media coverage for their clients compared to five years ago (**Question 4**).
- When asked which type of media coverage gets the most response on social media, the top choice was broadcast TV at 29% and daily newspapers (print) at 23%. TV (online), daily newspapers (online), and alternative publications (online) each ranked at 11% (**Question 14**).
- Most respondents (85%) said their clients could update their websites more regularly to more effectively promote their work (**Question 18**). Many

commented that a strong presence on social media plus strong social media skills are essential for successful promotion on social media (**Question 15**). The vast majority of respondents (94%) also see their clients' interactive presence on social media somewhat or greatly increasing in the next five years (**Question 20**).

- When asked to name the top three social media platforms their clients use to promote stories about their work, the top choice was Facebook, followed by Twitter and a combination of other platforms, notably Instagram. (**Question 16**).
- Fewer than half of survey participants identified user-friendly listings platforms by name (and Facebook got the most mentions with four). But when asked which listings platform is most cumbersome, one comment summed it up: "Most of them, unfortunately." (**Questions 21-22**)
- Almost 81% said they would actively help promote a very good listings platform. The vast majority of respondents (97%) say both mainstream and independent events would be included on their ideal listings platform. Sixty-three percent said it should be bilingual (English and French), while 31% feel it should be multilingual (English, French and other languages). (**Questions 23-24**)

Survey Summary: Journalists

Complete results available on ELAN's website (PDF):

<http://tinyurl.com/digitalshiftmedia>

The Digital Shift survey for publicists was distributed to over 30 journalists by email and confidential social media correspondence. It was also advertised in ELAN's monthly email newsletter sent to over 2000 recipients. A total of 12 journalists completed the survey.

Answering each question was optional. Since not all participants answered every question, the term "respondents" refers only to those who answered that particular question. Also, for the sake of ease and clarity, percentages were rounded off to the nearest percent.

- Respondents reported that in their experience the kinds of artists and arts companies that have the most difficulty getting media coverage are those in all disciplines with small budgets (up to \$1000) and, to a lesser extent, those with medium budgets (\$1001 to \$9999). In respondents' experience, artists and arts companies with large budgets (\$10,000 or more) have less difficulty getting media coverage. (**Question 3**)
- When asked what artists and arts organizations could do better to get media coverage, 82% of respondents said they could increase their presence on social media, and 82% said they could hire publicists to promote their events.

Meanwhile, 64% said they could regularly update their websites (64%) and hire publicists to promote their events (82%). **(Question 4)**

- The top two social media platforms respondents used to promote their stories are Facebook (90% chose this as their first option) and Twitter (90% chose this as their second option). **(Question 8)** The vast majority of respondents (90%) see their interactive presence on social media either somewhat or greatly increasing in the next five years. **(Question 9)**
- Just 9 of 12 survey respondents provided their answers on which is the most user-friendly platform for listings, with Facebook getting the most mentions (five). The remaining comments mention a handful of platforms like Cult MTL and the Tourisme Montréal blog, but underscore the void left by the closure of the Montreal Mirror and Hour. **(Question 10)** Respondents also commented that current print media is “difficult to access” and “very limiting” in what they cover, while web listings are cumbersome generally. **(Question 11)**
- All respondents (100%) said both mainstream and independent events would be included on their ideal listings platform. **(Question 12)** Sixty per cent said a listings platform should be bilingual (English and French), and an additional 30% said it should be English only. **(Question 13)** Eighty per cent of respondents said they would actively promote a comprehensive listings platform to their audiences and networks. **(Question 14)**

Project Activities: Focus Group Sessions

All three Digital Shift surveys give insight into what respondents think of their current situations. The results informed the topics discussed in two focus group sessions held on July 29, 2014, and August 11, 2014.

Many questions in all three surveys dealt with respondents' increasing interaction on social media, which they generally agree will continue to grow. The goal of the focus groups was to look at the infrastructure and options available to artists and arts organizations today, and how this infrastructure can be used and optimized to help them navigate the transition to new media and the ongoing developments associated with that transition.

Specific tips for how to maximize and best exploit social media were not discussed in detail during these focus groups, since the subject can best be handled in a course or workshop.

Focus Group Questions

These questions, along with highlights of the survey results, were sent to participants ahead of each focus group. They were used to structure the focus group discussions, but the conversations that arose were allowed to flow naturally between topics.

1.

Just five short years ago there were structures in place that helped promote local artists and arts organizations—such as the comprehensive listings in the now-defunct alt-weeklies *Hour* and the *Montreal Mirror*. These structures were widely accessible to both mainstream and alternative audiences, and required little effort from local artists and arts organizations to keep up-to-date. Five years later, these structures have disappeared or become less effective. What platforms are you now using to replace these structures? What existing tools, platforms or outlets do you find most useful, and would like to see further developed/exploited/combined to connect artists with their audiences?

2.

The Digital Shift surveys show that a majority of respondents believe that media coverage of work by artists and arts organizations in print daily and weekly newspapers and in broadcast radio and television is still the media they most desire to cover their work.

This seems to be influenced by the legitimacy and gatekeeping functions of traditional (“old”) media. But there also seems to be a disconnect between the perceived effectiveness and actual effectiveness of old media. For instance, a print publication's large audited readership does not necessarily mean more than a few hundred people may

read any given interview, preview or review. Whereas, niche blogs and websites seem to be hindered by the fact that their interviews, previews and reviews may only get a few hundred hits.

Is this perceived effectiveness of old media an obstacle to working with new media? What would it take for niche blogs and websites to win your trust, and the trust of your audiences?

3.

One of the recurring themes in all three surveys is how a sizable chunk of the audience is still not reachable by social media, despite social media's growing omnipresence. One third of artists and arts organizations surveyed reported that up to 40% of their audience is not reachable via social media. How do you think artists and arts organizations could best reach this isolated demographic, to unite them with their audiences?

4.

A majority of respondents in all three surveys report that their ideal listings platform would support alternative, indie and mainstream arts events, and both English and French listings. There appears to be widespread desire and need for an authoritative and definitive listings platform that would service not just Montreal, but the rest of Quebec as well. A majority of respondents in all three surveys replied they would actively support and help promote a very good comprehensive listings platform to their audiences and social media networks. If such a listings platform were to be created, who do you think should do it, and how should it be funded?

5.

Are there any existing structures that can be built on to help promote the work of artists and arts organizations?

Focus Group Participants

July 29, 2014 Session

- **Paul Aflalo**—No More Radio
- **Richard Burnett**—Digital Shift Project Manager
- **Mick Côté**—Montreal Gazette
- **Ian Ferrier**—Wired on Words
- **Barbara Ford**—PR and media relations

- **Shawn Katz**—The Rover
- **Amy Macdonald**—ELAN
- **Vanessa Rigaux**—Centaur Theatre
- **Guy Rodgers**—ELAN
- **Eloi Savoie**—Centaur Theatre
- **Andrew Tay**—Wants&Needs Danse
- **Dan Webster**—Greenland Productions

August 11, 2014 Session

- **Paul Aflalo**—No More Radio
- **Joe Balass**—Compass Productions
- **Richard Burnett**—Digital Shift Project Manager
- **Pat Dillon-Moore**—National Film Board of Canada (NFB)/CKUT radio
- **Christopher DiRaddo**—Writer and novelist
- **Susan Doherty-Hannaford**—Quebec Writers' Federation
- **Kayla Elman**—Segal Centre for Performing Arts
- **Deborah Forde**—Quebec Drama Federation
- **Bettina Forget**—Visual Voice Gallery/The Belgo Report
- **Mitch Joel**—Twist Image
- **Julia Kater**—AELAQ
- **Amy Macdonald**—ELAN
- **Rebecca Munroe**—Crowley Arts Centre
- **Guy Rodgers**—ELAN

Summary: July 29, 2014 Session

There were 12 participants in the first focus group session held on July 29, 2014, in Montreal. The 75-minute session progressed smoothly and there was broad consensus on various issues.

- Participants agreed that artists and arts organizations today must have a strong presence on the internet, especially on social media, and notably on Facebook and Twitter. They also agreed a website is a must, and is more useful when it is regularly updated and features a blog. This also makes it much easier to digitally communicate promotional materials to prospective employers (i.e. festivals, galleries, theatres, etc.) as well as to media.
- Participants agreed that the reach of social media is deliberately shrinking as major players like Facebook monetize postings to a wider audience. “There are limitations to what you can do on Facebook, they are clearly trying to get you promote specific posts and that is really frustrating,” said one participant. Another noted: “With the algorithm on Facebook now, it gives so much priority to promoted posts because Facebook wants your money.”
- It was also widely agreed that the use of photos, videos and other promotional materials is key in social media. Different platforms “all require something different and some kind of attention. So there has to be someone looking at it and focusing on the efforts.” Participants also agreed that old-school PR like posterizing and distributing flyers remains a key component of promoting events.
- Participants agreed maintaining social media accounts is a time-consuming job. As one participant noted: “We have a lot of great ideas, we are trying to do more but it’s a question of manpower to realize it, a question of time.”
- Participants also agreed having a lot of followers and getting a lot of “likes” on social media does not necessarily translate into tickets sold. “We have to get people to show up and buy tickets, get people to step away from their computer or smart phone [and that] is labour-intensive.”
- One participant observed: “The problem is how people decide what they are going to see has changed. Whereas 12 years ago I read the Montreal Mirror, now I probably wouldn’t go to something unless I heard about it via somebody else.” To which another participant replied: “That’s why Facebook is so big, because it’s your friend who invites you.”
- Participants agreed social media by itself is not a substitute for old media like print newspapers, commercial radio and television coverage. Ideally, they said, they want coverage in all media. That’s because, as one participant pointed out: “Old media is elitist but there is that kind of credibility, that established loyalty with the reader. Problem with blogs is they’re a little newer, it’s hard to build a

readership.”

- They also agreed a strong point of niche blogs is their passionate beat writers who produce insightful previews and the reviews needed to help sell shows. There was agreement that attracting and keeping these writers also means paying them, currently a serious problem for cash-strapped websites and blogs with little or no budgets.
- The conversation revealed support for the idea of a listings platform that would encompass all arts disciplines, indie and mainstream, in both English and French. The focus group thought listings could be incorporated into an existing website run by major players like the Gazette, CBC or Tourisme Montréal. The participants also agreed listings could be incorporated into a webpage like the Montreal Gazette’s #MTLfest page that could also serve as an aggregator of arts coverage published on other websites and blogs
- Participants liked the idea of a listings platform that featured, as one participant described it, a “blogroll—blogs that we believe are ethical, truthful and cover the stuff properly. I think it would also alleviate some of the problems [mainstream media have trying to] cover everything.”
- The focus group heard from one knowledgeable participant about their attempt to create software that could distribute artists’ event information to multiple listings websites like Yelp, Craigslist and Facebook. It was estimated that this would initially cost at least \$5,000 to develop, plus the costs of establishing and maintaining a home-base website for this one-stop listings service. “Then the problem is inviting everybody [to attend your event. For instance], Facebook used to have a select-all function, but they got rid of it.”
- Participants agreed that arts and arts organizations are working much harder today to promote their events, and that the wider community should sit down together to see if setting up a listings platform and aggregator page with a blogroll is doable. As one participant said: “Everybody is trying to do a massive job that could best be done collectively.”

Summary: August 11, 2014 Session

There were 14 participants in the second and final focus group session held on August 11, 2014, in Montreal. The 75-minute session saw the expression of a larger variety of viewpoints and featured less overall consensus in comparison to the first session. From the spirited discussion, several strong points emerged that complement the ideas developed in the first session.

- Participants agreed that artists and arts organizations today must have a strong presence on the internet, especially on social media which they must learn to

strategically harness in different ways, since platforms differ.

- As one participant pointed out: “People don’t really understand the dynamics of how social media works. Twitter is true real-time. Facebook is not, nor is YouTube. But as you create content, you have to understand the half-life of your work. You can post something on YouTube and six months later it’s still getting views. On Twitter nobody goes, ‘That tweet he wrote from last month?’ Every engine of social media has a very different half-life and dynamic.”
- There was agreement that artists and arts organizations need more than just social media to promote their events. Old-fashioned posterage and flyer distribution, along with grassroots methods of audience development and promotion, are still needed—especially to reach audiences and older demographics who are not as active on social media. As one participant noted: “If you want to connect with that crowd, go out there to them. There are partners who will provide opportunities for you to do so: go have tea in a senior-citizens home, go to your local community centres where kids are being picked up by their parents after school. These kinds of connections turn into ‘I’m going to come to your event.’”
- Participants bemoaned the loss of the cultural weeklies *Montreal Mirror* and *Hour*, pointing out how their curated coverage and listings helped sell tickets to events. But others insisted recreating that model online was not feasible: “You have to understand human behaviour to understand what’s happening. These listings and articles created this sense of serendipity. The internet and mobile phones don’t have that. The internet and mobile phones are completely personalized for what you want: your text messages, your email and your home page whenever you hit that button. So you don’t ‘discover’ *Cult MTL* on the internet. The way we discover and encounter arts and culture has also fundamentally changed. So to [recreate on the internet what we had] with *Hour*, *Mirror* and the *Gazette* in my estimation is stupid. You will never say, ‘What does the Internet have for me today?’ That’s what you’re trying to recreate and you can’t. So instead of making a frog walk, try to make a frog hop.”
- There was agreement that the audiences of Montreal’s extinct alt-weeklies existed in a kind of bubble: “Who reads this? Did you read this, or did your parents read it?” There was also agreement that friend networks on social media create a similar bubble.
- There was agreement that artists and arts organizations also exist in a bubble, but there was disagreement how to reach beyond this bubble. Suggestions ranged from artists and arts organizations changing their approach on social media to attract different audiences—“Why not have your painters go on the subway and paint? Film it and post it on YouTube”—to changing the product that artists or arts organizations are trying to sell: “The answer is that those people are not going to come—they don’t care. You’ve got to create more valuable content for them and their friends.” Another participant said artists and arts organizations need to

change how they treat their audiences: “Once I get young people into the theatre, they love it and come back. This idea that I don’t have to put on programming for them, that I don’t have to create a welcoming environment for them, that’s where we need to do the work.”

- There was much discussion about people on social media becoming “influencers”—i.e. multipliers and tastemakers, people who can influence their friends and followers to check out the products of local artists and arts organizations. This is done by friends posting on social media in a way that doesn’t feel like blatant advertising or “pimping.” Digital marketing specialist Mitch Joel of Twist Image told the focus group: “In Montreal, a good example is [CHOM deejay] Jason Rockman. When he shares [posts] you don’t feel like he’s pimping. You feel like he’s a friend telling you, ‘I’ll see you there, buddy.’ You have to support the individuals and their main influencers and bring them out, and they act as your hub, versus a centralization place because trying to create centralization in a highly fragmented and decentralized environment is like trying to spit in a tornado.”
- While Mitch Joel said creating a centralized platform “is like trying to spit in a tornado,” he also noted: “If there was an opportunity to build a publication that was government-supported, organization-supported, and the community was aware that this was the de facto place [to go for listings], that might be something.”
- Participants agreed the social media revolution has created a new generation gap: “My job is to reach out to those who aren’t buying tickets and this other audience—50-and-over who don’t use the internet—the basic truth of the matter is you have to have two market plans.”
- Participants agreed artists and arts organizations need to strategize “a diversified portfolio” when promoting their products, and target specific audiences with unorthodox and tailor-made PR campaigns, such as targeting organizations and associations whose membership (e.g. engineers) might be interested in your product (e.g. a theatre play about engineering). This means creating a “content-distribution strategy” that will expose one’s work to new audiences.
- Participants debated the usefulness of a curated listings platform, with some fearing it could play the role of gatekeeper in a negative sense by favouring some artists, arts organizations, and cultural communities above others. There was agreement that listings should be comprehensive but also sortable, for instance, able to be self-curated by users via algorithms and affinity propagation keyword searches. Observed one participant: “The only filter, the only curator in this instance, is the user. So what is important is the interface. So let’s throw everything in, in every language. This is the only way this is going to work. It has to be as big as possible because everything now is so fragmented.” It was also agreed that such a platform must be pragmatic and user-friendly.

- Another participant noted: “I think this whole listings thing is good if there is no gatekeeper and people can find what they’re looking for with keyword searches.”
- About setting up a listings platform in Montreal’s fragmented media and social media environments, Mitch Joel told the focus group: “I agree when I have family in town and I want to see what’s going on, I don’t know where to go. So I do agree if there was a place where I knew where to go to get this [information] that would be great. I think the challenges and fragmentation and making it functional and valuable, that’s always been the challenge. I don’t know if anybody has nailed it. Hour magazine nailed it and New York has basically nailed it. If there was an opportunity to build a publication that was government-supported, organization-supported, and the community was aware that this was the de facto place [to go for listings], that might be something.”

Meeting with Volunteer Consultant Mitch Joel

On October 3, 2014, Digital Shift Project Manager Richard Burnett, ELAN Executive Director Guy Rodgers, and ELAN Program Coordinator Amy Macdonald met with Twist Image President Mitch Joel at the Montreal offices of Twist Image, a global digital marketing agency that has helped major brands handle core digital marketing capabilities.

The ELAN team met with Joel—who volunteered to consult on the Digital Shift project—to clarify some points he made during the August 11, 2014, focus group session: Does he believe creating a web platform with comprehensive listings is doable? If not, what is the alternative, and how much would it cost to develop?

- **Joel said he would personally enjoy a web platform that combined comprehensive listings and aggregated content**, but he repeated his belief that while it would attract a proactive audience, it would have trouble drawing the passive audience that used to browse through the pages of the print editions of Montreal’s cultural weeklies. “Now that the cultural weeklies no longer exist, serendipity no longer exists,” Joel said. “It’s very hard to create that level of awareness in a world where people aren’t looking for ‘random.’ That’s the biggest challenge of replicating the weeklies.”
- Joel said another major hurdle in creating a destination web platform is financing an expensive awareness campaign via advertising.
- **Joel said he prefers the idea of creating a listings application** that would instead embed comprehensive listings into hundreds of other websites, such as those of artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts. **This would allow people seeking comprehensive listings to find them on hundreds of different websites instead of just on one centralized hub.** “You would give the participating websites the code to embed the listings on their own website,” Joel explained.
- Joel says creating such an application would require a team of developers—a front-end developer, a back-end developer, a database developer, an editor, curators and graphics. Joel estimates it would cost roughly \$25,000 to figure out how to create this application, and about \$175,000 more to actually create it. “Such an application may already exist, but would need to be tweaked to be multilingual,” Joel noted. **“To build a brand new centralized-destination web platform would be just as costly and at least as much work as creating a new listings application.”** Joel also pointed out a crucial feature on a listings application would be a “share” button for each individual listing.

What We Learned

- We confirmed from the three surveys that **the majority of artists and arts organizations surveyed are having trouble reaching their full potential audience** via social media. They are overworked and experiencing challenges just maintaining their resource- and time-consuming social media presence, never mind giving that presence the attention it really needs to flourish.
- We also learned that Digital Shift project participants believe **this digital shift will continue to accelerate, but PR and promotional strategies to adapt to the shift have not kept pace with the changes**. There seems to be some resistance to these changes as artists and arts organizations are confronted with the realization that they will have to adjust their business models, and rely more and more on themselves—and less and less on the media—to promote their events and products. This means artists and arts organizations need to accept this new reality and adapt their business models and time management, which may be easier said than done given the widespread lack of resources.
- There seems to be an interesting opportunity to explore the creation of a new **comprehensive and bilingual (English and French) listings platform**, with the hope that it will become a go-to resource for Montrealers and Quebecers searching for local entertainment options. Reservations among focus group participants about the danger of excluding certain artists by creating a curated site were assuaged when it was proposed a “self-curated” site could be based on algorithms, affinity propagation and keyword searches. The listings would include all potential artistic and cultural offerings, and would be highly sortable and user-friendly.
- Still, Mitch Joel said trying to create a centralized listings platform in an increasingly fragmented environment is “like spitting into a tornado.” But Joel also noted: “If there was an opportunity to build a publication that was government-supported, organization-supported, and the community was aware that this was the de facto place [to go for listings], that might be something.”
- In a follow-up meeting on October 3, 2014, Mitch Joel said he prefers the idea of creating a **listings application that would instead embed comprehensive event listings into hundreds of other websites**, such as those of artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts. This would allow people seeking comprehensive listings to find them on hundreds of different websites instead of just on one centralized hub.
- During the focus group sessions there was a fair amount of interest in creating a **web platform that would host comprehensive event listings, a blogroll of links to existing arts coverage, and/or aggregate stories from other arts websites and blogs** covering Montreal and Quebec artists and arts organizations. But participants seemed to agree that the benefits of creating a webpage with a

prospective partner like Tourisme Montréal, CBC or the Montreal Gazette—that is, creating a webpage on an already-existing website—make this option preferable to building a costly stand-alone website from scratch. Mitch Joel says building a brand new centralized-destination web platform “would be just as costly and at least as much work as creating a new listings application,” which he estimated at roughly \$200,000.

- Despite the fact that participants want to align their social media approaches with best practices and adapt their promotion strategies to the realities of the digital shift, they were aware that **simply using social media or new media is not a panacea**. This is especially true because social media provides a highly personalized, streamlined experience catered to each user’s individual community and interests. Additionally, sharing good content with an online community of followers doesn’t necessarily lead to more tickets or paintings or albums purchased.
- **More than ever, artists and arts organizations must develop meaningful, thoroughgoing relationships with their audiences and supporters.** Social media can be a powerful tool to help nourish these relationships, but as we heard from the project’s participants, using tried and true strategies like distributing posters and flyers; visiting schools, community centres, and other institutions; and encouraging their boards and devoted fans to help spread the word about what they do are as important as ever. Even with social media at their disposal, the challenge of reaching new audiences who haven’t already heard of an artist or arts organization remains.
- Overall, there was a palpable eagerness to adapt to new realities. After working very hard on their own with limited resources to reach wider audiences, players across the table recognized the urgent need to **move forward by working together** because the problem is bigger than any one of them can fix on their own. There was a sense of agreement that pooling their efforts to create solutions is the next step.

Immediate Outcomes

- There appears to be **solid interest in an authoritative and definitive listings platform** that would service not just Montreal, but the rest of Quebec as well. A majority of respondents in all three surveys replied they would actively support and help promote a very good comprehensive listings platform to their audiences and networks. A majority of respondents in all three surveys report that their ideal listings platform would support both independent and mainstream arts events, and both English and French listings.
- There is the growing **realization that artists and arts organizations live in a bubble of friends and colleagues**, and need to reach beyond this bubble. But while focus group participants noted that now-defunct publications like Hour and the Montreal Mirror created similar bubbles of audiences with shared interests—and rarely reached beyond their communities/reader demographics—it was recognized that the same phenomenon exists on social media.
- The survey of artists and arts organizations illustrates how many respondents lack social media skills and the time to update and maintain their presence on social media. This points to the **need for social media workshops** that would help participants maximize their time management and social media skills to help sell their products.
- Focus group participants understand that artists and arts organizations **need more than just social media to promote their events**. Old-fashioned postering and flyer distribution are still needed to reach audiences and older demographics who are not active on social media.
- The surveys and focus group sessions also highlighted how artists and arts organizations **need to create and adapt PR and promotional campaigns** to sell their products beyond their traditional constituencies. In other words, PR campaigns need to specifically target audiences “outside the bubble” to entice them to buy products by English-language artists and arts organizations.
- The focus group sessions and general reactions to the surveys indicated there is a **growing sense of community-building around this issue**, and there is widespread agreement that future meetings involving artists, arts organizations, publicists and prospective corporate and media partners should be organized to follow up on the concrete proposals of this report. As one participant said: “Everybody is trying to do a massive job that could best be done collectively.” Focus group participants appreciated the chance to share their frustrations and insights on the digital shift and its effects on visibility, promotion, and audience development. There is solid interest in keeping these conversations going.

Recommendations

1.

The surveys and focus group sessions clearly showed that while artists and arts organizations feel they must devote more time to social media, many are not doing so. Many feel they do not have the time and resources to properly build and sustain their social media presence, while others are unsure of basic strategies to promote and sell their work on social media, especially since best practices are constantly shifting with the changing social media landscape.

It seems imperative that artists and arts organizations connect with marketing and promotion workshops that incorporate all aspects of self-promotion on social media, while also explaining how promotion on social media differs from and complements effective grassroots promotion. This will enable them to promote and sell their products and events in ways that are adapted to the changing environments of social media and new media.

Artists and arts organizations can attend existing social media workshops such as those offered by YES Montreal. However, the widespread inadequacy and lack of skills on the part of many artists and arts organizations demand comprehensive, even multi-session workshops to better establish a solid footing for all participants. Structures for sharing social media best practices could also be integrated into a multi-session, ongoing workshop structure, whether through informal networking among past and present attendees or more formalized working groups.

Recommendation 1

*ELAN—perhaps in collaboration with YES Montreal and/or its key partners in the Digital Shift project (AELAQ, QDF, QWF and Studio 303)—should establish a **social media skills workshop** specifically tailored to the needs of English-language artists and arts organizations in Quebec. The importance of artists and arts organizations developing their social media skills, in conjunction with other promotional and audience development strategies, cannot be underestimated. Such a course should be comprehensive, rather than just a brief workshop—and could be combined with ongoing sharing of best practices and experiences.*

Benefits for Artists

- Access to knowledge, resources, and best practices for promoting their work through social media.
- Both individual artists and organizational staff would be equipped to make the most efficient use of their resources by learning which strategies work and where to focus their time and effort.
- Ongoing knowledge sharing.
- Increases in audience engagement, visibility, and sales.

Benefits for Audiences

- Improved access to information about local artists and arts organizations through social media.
- Increased sense of participation and pride in local arts communities through effective and engaging social media interaction.

Challenges

- Artists and arts organizations may have very little time to dedicate to ongoing professional development and learning.
- Without a strong structure and commitment from experts, ongoing instruction could struggle to keep up with continual shifts in the ways social media is used.
- Learning how to better use social media will not address the question of how to engage audiences who are not active on social media platforms. Likewise, effective social media use is not a panacea for the challenges of gaining visibility and developing new audiences.
- Social media best practices could vary widely depending on the artistic discipline, aesthetic and target audience of a given organization or artist—and even on their artistic output itself. Ongoing generation of best practices may need to be tailored more closely to the situation of an individual artist or organization than a workshop could allow.

2.

Throughout the surveys and focus groups, the concept of combining French and English listings received overwhelming support. Although Quebec's French-language media seem to be on slightly steadier ground than their English counterparts, the province's French-language artists and arts organizations are struggling with many of the same questions that spawned the Digital Shift project.

Focus group participants demonstrated a palpable sense of willingness to collaborate in order to achieve improvements that could not be realized by working alone. If a truly comprehensive, bilingual and effective listings platform is to be developed, and if all promising solutions and partnerships are to be explored, this willingness to collaborate must extend to our French-language colleagues.

Recommendation 2

*Working groups or initiatives arising out of the Digital Shift project should **proactively reach out to French-language arts and media groups** such as Culture Montréal and La Vitrine. Collaborating and learning from each other's experiences, as well as making efforts to reach new audience bases where appropriate, will produce bilingual, inclusive and ultimately more effective solutions to problems we all share.*

Benefits for Artists

- Increased partnership and collaboration with French-language colleagues.
- Establishment, consolidation, and strengthening of French-language audiences for English-language artists and organizations who wish to do so, and likewise for French-language artists who wish to reach an English-language market.
- Improved cultural understanding across linguistic groups.

Benefits for Audiences

- Increased access to information about Quebec arts and culture across linguistic lines.
- Discovery of artists whose work is currently underpromoted in media and listings in one language or the other.
- Improved cultural understanding across linguistic groups.

Challenges

- Recruiting a critical mass of both French- and English-language partners will require a great deal of time and care.
- Project ideas will have to be well-articulated in both languages, with clear benefits for both French- and English-language artists and audiences.

3.

The surveys and focus groups indicated quite strong support for the creation of a listings platform for artistic and cultural events that would encompass all artistic disciplines, both independent and mainstream, in both English and French. Many participants agreed that creating a universal and comprehensive listings platform would be very useful to promote the arts in Montreal and Quebec.

However, a comprehensive listings platform may not provide enough incentive for audiences to change their habits to include a new online destination, even if that destination comes with the name of a major player attached. Strong editorial content—either sourced from existing locations or written especially for the new platform—in conjunction with thorough and complete listings could be necessary to provide engaging content that would drive users to the listings. Time Out was mentioned in the August 11 focus group and also by ELAN’s media committee as an example of a media entity that successfully combines comprehensive listings and editorial coverage. Aggregated editorial content could also be used to bridge the gap between old and new media and their respective audiences to a certain extent, while ensuring a wide representation of disciplines and types of cultural and artistic production.

All of these potential options could feature a blogroll of links to existing arts stories, serving as an aggregator of arts coverage already published on other websites and blogs.

Both listings and aggregated stories could be “self-curated” via algorithms, affinity propagation and key-word searches; and sortable by artistic discipline, location, date and any number of other useful categories. Listings, in particular, should be universal and comprehensive, and content (either aggregated or editorial) should ensure a fair representation of diverse artistic communities and art forms.

Establishing a combined listings and coverage platform could be achieved by:

1. Creating a completely new and independent online destination. This would require a considerable amount of resources, time and effort, but the result could be tailored to the specific needs of the partners and community. The product could also potentially be exported to other cities and markets.
2. Incorporating a listings platform into an existing website run by a major player like the Montreal Gazette, the CBC or Tourisme Montréal. For instance, July 29 focus group participants discussed the idea of incorporating listings into an existing webpage like the Gazette’s #MTLfest page. The advantage of this option is that it piggy-backs on existing infrastructure. If the arts community is prepared to rally around the creation of a listings platform with an accompanying blogroll/aggregator, meetings with the Gazette, CBC, Tourisme Montréal and Tourisme Québec would need to illustrate how their hosting such a webpage would be beneficial for them, i.e. increasing traffic to their own websites.

Recommendation 3

*ELAN and its partners should establish a committee to explore the possibility of a **user-friendly web platform combining comprehensive bilingual listings, a blogroll and either original or aggregated editorial content**. In addition to examining the options at hand, this committee should identify potential corporate and media partners, as well as other sources of funding.*

Benefits for Artists

- Combining comprehensive listings with editorial content (whether aggregated or original) could help artists gain visibility in addition to ticket/product sales.
- If the listings platform were truly comprehensive, authoritative and user-friendly, artists and organizations would only have to submit listings to one place.
- A user-friendly and accessible listings platform would help artists reach beyond their already-established audiences and their own community ‘bubbles,’ which often consist of other artists.
- The creation of original editorial content would mean paid work for local artists—writers, photographers, videographers, etc.

Benefits for Audiences

- Discovery of new artists and arts organizations (driven by editorial content) could

- be directly linked to opportunities to experience their work (driven by listings). This would make it easier for audiences to engage in and support local arts.
- A comprehensive listings platform could streamline the process of finding out what's on, particularly for general consumers, tourists, and others who are not already plugged in to events through friends and artistic community 'bubbles' on social media.
 - Quality editorial content, combined with truly comprehensive listings, could restore a sense of excitement and discovery around local arts, while still taking into account the pragmatic realities of the digital shift.

Challenges

- As Mitch Joel pointed out during the follow-up meeting, creating a completely new platform would require a large infusion of money and time to change users' habits and drive them towards a new 'destination.' This would be particularly true for casual, general consumers, but also for plugged-in arts consumers whose online habits are established and comfortable.
- Content creators (writers, photographers, illustrators, videographers, etc.) should be compensated fairly for their work. This is a constant challenge even for online platforms that already exist. If original content is to be created for the site, careful planning will be required with respect to revenue streams and expenses.
- Related to the above point, this type of website has been attempted before in Montreal, and the results have not been clearly successful. Artists, audiences, and organizations must be on board, ready and willing to promote the initiative. Most importantly, the results must be worth promoting—truly high-quality and useful. Finally, the public must be willing to support such a platform—including financially (e.g. by purchasing advertising), if the business model allows for it. Some participants voiced concern that this would be a challenge in Montreal's arts community.

4.

The surveys and focus group sessions clearly show that submitting event information to a myriad of largely marginal listings platforms is a frustrating and time-consuming job. This could be made much easier and faster by creating a single software application which could automatically redistribute listings to multiple platforms like La Vitrine, Cult MTL, Where Are the Shows, Nightlife and even perhaps Facebook.

Instead of entering their events individually onto various websites and listings services, artists or organizations would enter their event information into a single standardized online form. The form would allow event information to be distributed to already-existing event listings platforms in order to be posted.

One focus group participant who has explored this low-budget option in detail estimated it would initially cost at least \$5,000, plus the costs of establishing and maintaining a home-base website where data would be entered for this one-stop listings redistribution

service. Alternatively, the form could be hosted on an already existing web platform (such as the Gazette's #MTLfest page or the Tourisme Montréal blog).

Recommendation 4

*ELAN and its partners should explore the possibility of developing a **standardized one-stop submission form which would allow artists to submit to multiple listings services at once**. Part of this recommendation would involve identifying potential media or corporate partners to host the standardized form on an already existing web platform. Possible alternatives to establish and fund a new user-friendly web platform to host the standardized form should also be identified.*

Benefits for Artists

- Possible tie-ins with social media could eliminate the duplication of certain tasks (e.g. creating events on multiple online platforms), cutting down on time and energy put into event promotion.
- This relatively modest recommendation has already been explored by one of the Digital Shift focus group participants, so there is an existing base of knowledge and experience to work with to meet artists' needs.

Benefits for Audiences

- With artists able to easily submit events to multiple locations, event listings on platforms that audiences already use and visit out of habit would become more comprehensive and ultimately more useful.
- Audiences would not have to revise or change the way they currently view event listings. It would not be necessary to drive audiences towards a completely new platform, so it would not require much outreach or advertising.

Challenges

- The standardized form would require ongoing updates to keep pace with changes to the layout or structure of existing listings platforms.
- This recommendation is modest, but so is its potential impact.

5.

Mitch Joel stressed that internet users already have a set group of websites, listings platforms and social media platforms that they visit on a regular basis, rather than seeking out serendipity online. To harmonize with users' established habits, he recommended creating an application that could embed event listings into other websites that people already visit, such as those of artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts.

With the creation of such an application, event information would be entered by artists

and arts organizations into a standardized form, as in Recommendation 4. However, rather than sending event information to already-existing listings sites, the information received through the form would be entered into a centralized database. Interested media outlets, artists, etc. could then embed a widget, or a few lines of code, onto their own websites to give their own audiences a glimpse of the events in the centralized database. Events drawn from the database and displayed on other websites could be sortable by date, discipline, region, and other useful categories. For instance, a niche blog covering visual arts could choose to display only visual arts events on its site widget. Joel also pointed out a crucial feature on a listings application would be a “Share” button for each individual event listing. This would allow website visitors to easily spread the word through their social media networks about events they discover through the widget.

According to Joel, creating such an application would require a team of developers—a front-end developer, a back-end developer, a database developer, an editor, curators and graphics. Joel estimates it would cost roughly \$25,000 to figure out how to create this application, and about \$175,000 more to actually create it.

Recommendation 5

*ELAN and its partners should apply for a grant, or identify other partners and funding sources, to create a **centralized event database linked to an application that media outlets, artists, arts organizations and supporters of the arts could embed onto their own websites** in order to show those listings (either comprehensive or sorted according to their own preferences and their audience’s needs). This project should also detail the next phase of development and identify corporate and media partners and sources of funding to create, establish and market the application.*

Benefits for Artists

- This solution would allow artists and arts organizations to harmonize their efforts with internet users’ established habits, while also taking advantage of an existing local infrastructure of blogs, websites, etc.
- This application could potentially fulfill Recommendation 4 as well. The form artists use to enter event information could potentially be built to send listings to multiple listings platforms to be posted using their own format, in addition to entering the centralized database.

Benefits for Audiences

- The application would facilitate a certain kind of serendipity, with users able to discover events they might not otherwise have known about during routine visits to trusted sources of information.
- The ability to tailor event listing widgets to particular audiences would help increase the likelihood of users discovering events relevant to their interests.
- This recommendation would not require internet users to go too far outside their usual online routines.

Challenges

- If those who agree to display the widget are mainly artists, arts organizations, and arts-conscious media outlets, it's possible that not many new or latent casual audience members would be reached, since they would not already be visiting those websites.
- Website owners might be reluctant to display the widget for a variety of reasons (aesthetic contrast to existing web design, possibility of widget displaying events in competition with their own, etc.).
- Though ELAN has a number of potential leads to follow in terms of establishing the feasibility and pragmatic scope of this recommendation, it could prove to be very expensive. A great deal of outreach and recruitment would be necessary in order to spread the widget to enough websites to ensure its success and usefulness.