

Interactive TV for Children Workshop

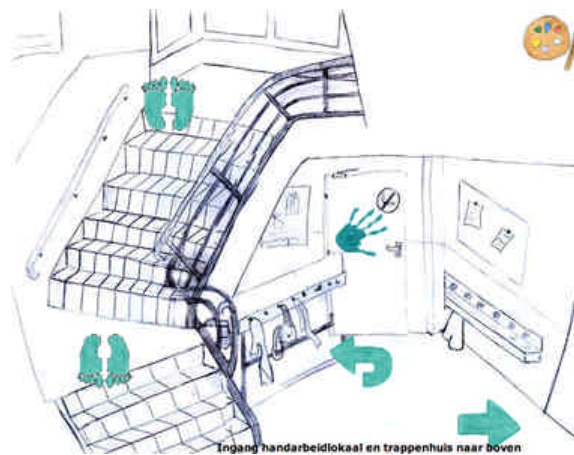
Cinekid, 23th to 29th October 2006.

(Ana Vitória Joly)

Cinekid, the International Film, Television and New Media Festival for Children and Mediamatic organized a workshop for professionals on interactive television for children during the Cinekidfestival. According to the organizers children spend as much time behind their computers as in front of the TV. These media are blending in a technical sense, through set-top boxes and online TV. But there is still a great lack of interesting content for interactive television and this workshop tried to do something about that.

During the workshop there were presentations of recent and inspiring interactive projects for children such as: The School with Most Windows (www.deschoolmetdemeesteramen.nl), Cinekid Studio (www.cinekidstudio.nl), and Sofias's Diary (<http://www.diariodesofia.pt/>).

The school with most windows is a Dutch project, a hand drawn interactive school. Children made drawings, stories and pictures of the school and the building was slowly built on-line.



Cinekid Studio is a platform for media creation for children to publish and share their drawings, animations and films that also provides ways to build upon others work.



Sofia's Diary is an interactive multiformat soap opera in which it was created a parallel world 24/7 Sofia's virtual world, to enable a relationship between the character and the audience. There is a daily 5/7 minutes interactive TV episodes broadcasted at 8:30pm followed by interactive voting service to decide what will happen next episode. Web content (text and pictures) published 9pm, Premium Call Service (Sofia tells on the phone a summary of daily episode), Mobile VOD of 1 minute clips, Radio Soap, Daily SMS/MMS alerts sent by Sofia to her friends with teasers and weekly 30 minutes episodes.

Royalty is the key according to the lecturer Nuno Bernardo and he engaged the audience with interactivity and reinforces that push initiatives to mobile are important to maintain this royalty.



These examples have different levels of interactivity; the two first ones are tools that allow users to add content, there are some "rules" but the users are authors.

Sofia's Diary in the other hand provides interactivity allowing the user to make decisions through the voting service however these decisions will not have a great impact on the narrative, the narrative has some flexibility but the interactivity does not change the main story but events that do not affect the story line.

The most important thing to mention is that, as you may notice, the three examples are on-line projects, Sofia's Diary is the only one that has some television broadcasting, but started as a website and after eight months the show started to be broadcasted on TV. And so what does that mean? Interactive television for children is not TV! Maybe because children want more interactivity than digital TV is able to provide so the on-line tools are much more efficient and are attracting much more users. The point is that television stills a great medium and reaches a large audience, so perhaps the ideal should actually deep in the cross-media production providing user-generated content through computers, linear content through TV and communication through mobile. Integrating the right Medias and making use of their potentials success may be achieved and projects as great as Banzooki (www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/bamzooki/) may be developed.