

## Australia's screen future is online: time to support our new content creators

Written by Stuart Cunningham, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology

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RackaRacka, a sketch channel on YouTube, have been called Australia's most successful content creators. Screenshot from YouTube

Ever heard of Mighty Car Mods? Or maybe RackaRacka? Or perhaps Veritasium? These are a few of the most famous Australian screen creators you might never have heard of.

[Mighty Car Mods](#) are a couple of petrolheads who run the world's number-one independent online DIY automotive show (their [most-viewed video](#) has had 6.6 million views).

[RackaRacka](#), run out of Adelaide by brothers Danny and Michael Philippou, creates action-packed videos full of choreographed fight scenes, comic violence, and pop culture references (their [Marvel v DC video](#) has had nearly 50 million views). Graeme Mason, the CEO of Screen Australia, has described RackaRacka as Australia's [most successful content creator](#)

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You might know [Veritasium](#) as Derek Muller, presenter of SBS documentaries on nuclear power, but who has been leading Australia's contribution to popular science online and around the world (with 35 million views for his [video on the Magnus Effect](#))

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Last week the Australian government released a [consultation paper](#) as part of its review into [Australian and Children's Screen Content](#)

. The paper acknowledges the explosion of screen content available to Australians online, and the disruption this has caused to many traditional business models in the screen sector.

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However, it is fair to say there is no consensus on what, if anything, to do about it.

A new industry is emerging based on previously amateur creators turning pro and working across many platforms such as Youtube and other social media, building global fan communities and creating their own media brands. Established industry professionals worry about its lack of quality and that online content creation is not a sustainable career. Actually, it is a real opportunity for Australian creators.

### Dream numbers

Screen creators such as RackaRacka are producing viewer numbers of which our broadcasters could only dream. At the same time these creators are exporting Australian culture to the world, and generating real export dollars from their huge overseas audiences through a mixture of digital advertising revenue, merchandising, live appearances and other innovative methods. These twin goals have proven very challenging over some time for Australia's screen content industry.

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Worldwide more than three million YouTube creators earn some level of income from their uploaded content, and 3,500 YouTube channels have at least a million subscribers. In Australia, there are now [65 online creators with more than one million subscribers](#), and about 90% of their video views come from overseas.

A [Google-funded study](#) by AlphaBeta estimates the number of content creators in Australia has more than doubled over the last 15 years, almost wholly driven by the entry of 230,000 new creators of online video content. The same study estimates that online video has created a A\$6 billion consumer surplus, or the benefit of a service on top of what they've paid for it.

### New voices, new business models

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For its consultation paper, the government wants to know what its role in the screen industry, both traditional and online, should be. It's long been accepted that the creation of content that tells uniquely Australian stories requires government support.

While that remains the case, the government needs to address the evidence that the creation of local Australian online video content is booming and that this has happened with very little government regulation or market intervention. This would suggest that regulation is not the answer to securing the benefits of online video content for Australia.

Platforms like YouTube have allowed creators to commercialise niche content by aggregating small audiences in many countries from around the world into large fanbases. There's perhaps no better example of this than the YouTube channel [Primitive Technology](#). Videos on the channel record a man in remote far north Queensland making primitive huts and tools from scratch using only natural materials.

The videos include no dialogue and you barely see the man's face. This type of content would never interest a broadcaster, commercial or public. And yet the channel, which launched just over two years ago, has already attracted more than 4.5 million subscribers and its 26 videos have been viewed more than 270 million times.

The popularity of online content creators, and their ability to engage especially new and passionate viewers, explains why Screen Australia has partnered with Google on its successful [Skip Ahead program](#) three times since 2014 to provide funding for popular online creators to "take their work to the next level".

## A gap for government

Australia's media industry has changed since the current laws and regulations were drawn up, no more so than in the booming world of online video. As the government ponders its role in supporting Australian content, it should address the online challenge to historical models while also embracing the ongoing success of our online video creators and the stories they tell.

The biggest gap in the consultation paper is a lack of attention to new online business models.

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What the paper calls “user generated content” is beginning to transform what Australian content is, and who is engaging with it. The review purports not to be a narrow review of only regulation. Funding support and the needs of the viewers are also on the table. Therefore, it should do three things.

First, it should consider how the government can get a true picture of what screen content Australians, especially the millennial generation largely lost to traditional television, are engaging with.

Second, it should consider a new content fund that facilitates new ways of producing content, and ensuring that creators have sustainable careers. While there are well-established models for film and TV funding, this requires a new approach.

Third, it should consider how to ensure this content fund supports new voices who can genuinely engage with those who have been lost to traditional television and cinema going. It is time to start taking so-called “user generated content” seriously.

*Stuart Cunningham receives funding from the Australian Research Council to conduct research on which this article is based. He has also held a Fulbright Senior Scholarship to conduct research relevant as background to this article. He has also consulted for Google Australia.*

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