Inventing the future of media

NYU ITP course, Fall 2010
Instructor: Ien Cheng

SUMMARY

Get ready to invent the future of media. The media industry is undergoing unprecedented disruption and reinvention amidst the digital revolution.

The goal of the course, which interleaves study and practice, is to equip you to invent the future of the media based on a holistic understanding of how a wide range of media products and businesses have worked in the past and are working – or not working – in the present.

As a final project, you will outline a plan for a new media business that features a prototype of an innovative user experience and a viable business model.

The course is structured around the roles or use cases of media – for instance to inform, to entertain, or to connect us to each other – rather than around increasingly obsolete distinctions between media platforms.

We look at each use case in three ways: by surveying the history of how each role has been served by the media in the past, by doing a case study of an established company that is “reinventing” a traditional media product for the future, and doing a corresponding case study of a disruptive or "de novo" upstart.

Our approach is holistic, exploring how content, distribution, interactivity, business models, and organizational models relate to each other. We combine historical studies, business case studies, industry reports, guest lectures from media industry executives, and, above all, direct experience and analysis of user experiences. Throughout, we focus on technology and user experience design as key aspects of media change and innovation. We also touch on the role of government regulation.

The course culminates in the final project. You take ideas that you have been brainstorming from the first class and develop them into plans and prototypes for new media businesses based on research, user testing, and ingenuity.

The ability to "sketch out" and prototype a product and imagine how it might be created and experienced in the real world is the most important prerequisite. Likewise a willingness to make connections across traditionally separate areas of media and try new ideas is critical. Experience in the media industry, and with business or strategy planning, is helpful but not required.
INSTRUCTOR

Ien Cheng has been a senior media executive and product manager at Google, the Financial Times, and Bloomberg. He combines product, editorial, commercial and technical experience with entrepreneurial creativity, operational management skills, and board-level strategic leadership. His interests include design, human-computer interaction, new business models, and innovative user experiences.

Ien is currently chief of staff of Bloomberg L.P.’s consumer media group, which includes Bloomberg Television, Bloomberg Radio, Bloomberg.com, Bloomberg’s mobile apps, and Bloomberg Businessweek magazine. Previously he was a Product Management Director overseeing all ad products in Europe at Google and Publisher and Managing Editor of FT.com, the Financial Times global website. Ien studied computer science at MIT and English literature at Cambridge University.

GRADING

25% – In-class contributions
This is a seminar and thoughtful and creative class participation is important.

25% – Blogging and online discussion
There are weekly readings/videos about media. There are also weekly media experiences to read, watch, interact with – some assigned, some discovered or suggested by you. There is a class blog for discussion during the week, and thoughtful and creative contributions are expected.

25% – Two student case studies
Each student selects and produces two case studies – each examining an existing media product or service. Each study includes an analysis of the product or service and the student’s proposals for changes or improvements.

25% – Final project
The final project, which you work on throughout the course, is your hands-on chance to invent the future of media. You will create a strategic plan for a new solution to a media use case of your choosing, featuring a prototype of the user experience.
SCHEDULE

NOTES

- Class topics are intentionally scheduled in an eclectic order, to encourage creative thinking as you work on case studies and the final project
- Industry guest speakers are planned for most of these classes, with specific guests to be confirmed closer to the time
- The order of classes may change depending on availability of guests

WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION

- The goal and structure of the class
- What is media? What's the media industry?
- Why focus on roles/use cases of media rather than media platforms?
- The five interconnected lenses of content, distribution, interactivity, organizational model, business models
- The power of technology
- The power of user experience design
- REGULAR ASSIGNMENT: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)
- FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT: start brainstorming about final project ideas (due next week)

WEEK 2 – Join the club (Media a hub of a community of interest)

- SURVEY: letters to the editor, newsletters, magazines, niche websites, online communities, moderation of comments, etc.
- CASE STUDY – REINVENTION: Sports Illustrated, tablet edition
- CASE STUDY – DE NOVO: Hacker News, a crowdsourced news aggregator and discussion forum for hackers
- REGULAR ASSIGNMENT: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)
- CASE STUDY ASSIGNMENT: first student case study (due week 5)
WEEK 3 – Just look it up (Media as provider of reference information)

- **SURVEY**: encyclopedias, dictionaries, phone books, digital text books, Google, Demand Media, Wolfram Alpha, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: ZAGAT
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: Quora
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)

WEEK 4 – Play time (Media as provider of interactive entertainment)

- **SURVEY**: board games, video games, consoles and other platforms, subscription models, Zynga model, story vs. gameplay, mobile revolution, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: one of the upcoming 3D triple-A console “first-person shooter” game
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: a one- or two-person indie game e.g. Super Meat Boy or Osmos
- **FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT**: start narrowing down and fleshing out final project ideas for class presentation (due next week)

WEEK 5. STUDENT CASE STUDIES / FINAL PROJECT IDEAS

- Student presentations of first case studies (assigned in week 3)
- **CASE STUDY ASSIGNMENT**: second student case study (due week 9)
- Open discussion of final project ideas with group feedback
- **FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT**: including plans for content, distribution, interactivity, business model, and organizational model, plus technology plan and user experience prototype (due week 13)

WEEK 6. Let’s get together (Media as enabler of social interaction)

- **SURVEY**: telephone, BBS, email, SMS, Yahoo Groups, blogs, Facebook, who owns online identity?, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: the postcard
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: Hashable, a startup tool for tracking relationship
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)
WEEK 7. Getting the job done (Media as provider of specialist information)

- **SURVEY**: trade magazines, speciality e-newsletters and sites, Bloomberg Anywhere, trade conferences, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: Consumer Electronics Show
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: Roubini Global Economics
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)

WEEK 8. Sit back and enjoy (Media as provider of passive entertainment)

- **SURVEY**: TV and the broadcast and cable TV models, HD, 3D, reality shows, video technologies, YouTube, novels as e-books, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: Jay Leno at 10pm
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: CollegeHumor.com
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)

WEEK 9. STUDENT CASE STUDIES / FINAL PROJECT UX FOCUS GROUPS

- Student presentations of second case studies (assigned in week 5)
- Final project user experience prototype in-class focus groups
- Review of final project requirements
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)

WEEK 10. The real world (Special topic: physical space as media)

- **NOTE**: unlike the other class topics, physical space is not a use case, but rather cuts across multiple use cases
- **SURVEY**: McLuhan's light bulb, coffee shops, stadiums and sports arenas, carnival, outdoor advertising, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION**: Starbucks as media
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO**: pop-up art galleries
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT**: readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)
WEEK 11 – **What’s new? (Media as provider of general news)**

- **SURVEY:** newspapers, radio, broadcast TV, cable TV, web, online video, aggregation, news vs. commentary, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION:** the New York Times online pay model
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO:** Twitter as news platform
- **REGULAR ASSIGNMENT:** readings, experiencing media, blogging and online discussion (due next week)

WEEK 12. **Music to my ears (Media as platform for musical entertainment)**

- **SURVEY:** radio, recorded music, digital downloads, per song vs. subscription models, concerts as new business model, etc.
- **CASE STUDY – REINVENTION:** The Beatles on iTunes
- **CASE STUDY – DE NOVO:** Spotify

WEEKS 13-14. **FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**

- In-class presentation and discussion of final projects