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Greening the Screen: A Model for Sector Engagement in Sustainable Development

Abstract

There is a growing recognition by the business community that long-term sustainable development requires good environmental and social performance. The business benefits are well documented. Screen production is a high impact industry and faces similar business challenges. For film and television programmes about environmental issues, we might expect the production to be made in an environmentally responsible manner. Greening behind the scenes is not exclusive to environmental programmes; all types of production benefit from good environmental practices no matter what the storyline.

Screen industry professionals are talented, innovative and receptive to environmental and social messages. They show great concern for the environment but admit that there is a lot more that needs to be done to understand the impacts of the industry. The sector is growing rapidly and good environmental management practices will ensure that growth is sustainable for the environment and for the wider community. New Zealand's spectacular scenery and "clean green" brand is showcased through screen production.

Through film and television, all sorts of information is synthesized to educate, inspire, challenge and effect behaviour change. The film industry is unique in its ability to influence audiences drawn from a wide cross-section of society. Some claim that film and television companies have an unwritten responsibility to use their influence for a greater good such as sustainable development.

In consultation with a wide range of screen production organisations, an environmental toolkit has been developed for the New Zealand film and television industry. This is believed to be the first of its kind in the world and the process for its development provides a model for engaging with other sectors. Because of the nature of the industry where many individuals and small companies come together for a production and then disperse to other productions, these practices will spread virally.

1 Introduction

Screen production is a high impact industry and faces similar business challenges to the general business community. Some leading overseas studios, film production companies and their sector bodies have been engaged in developing environmentally preferable screen production practices since the late 1980s (EMA, 2002a).

The business case for the adoption of corporate social and environmental responsibility is well documented. For New Zealand the business case is possibly more compelling because of the economic value of the “clean green” New Zealand brand and the rapid growth of the sector. Good environmental management practices will ensure that growth is sustainable for the environment and for the wider community.

The uptake of environmental management practices by screen production companies vary according to country and the size of the company. The level of engagement in environmental management in the overseas film industry ranges from industry guidance specifically tailored for the screen production industry to the publication of environmental and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports. Overseas engagement in sustainability is more advanced than the New Zealand screen production industry with companies in the European Union being the most advanced.

There has always been a niche market for film, television and documentary based on the natural environment or environmental issues. It is not surprising to learn that such productions are made in an environmentally responsible manner. This is well illustrated with the recent release of Al Gore’s documentary – ‘An Inconvenient Truth’. In keeping with the climate change theme the makers advertised the production was carbon neutral within the credits and the publicity material. However, environmental responsibility for mainstream screen productions is still a relatively new concept.

SustainAbility and WWF-UK (SustainAbility and WWF-UK, 2004) assessed the non-financial reports of a selection of media and entertainment companies and found that they focused on the direct environmental impacts, the environmental footprint, of their immediate operations rather than on the far greater, though indirect, influence that they have on audiences through their communications. Through film and television, all sorts of information is synthesised to educate, inspire, challenge and effect behaviour change. The film industry is unique in its ability to influence audiences drawn from a wide cross-section of society. Some claim that film and television companies have an unwritten responsibility to use their influence for a greater good such as sustainable development.

The New Zealand screen production industry is a major vehicle for showcasing the nation as ‘Clean Green New Zealand’. It is the vision of New Zealand captured on film that attracts more and more international production companies and tourists to visit New Zealand every year. The screen production industry was identified in the ministry of Economic Development’s Growth and Innovation Framework (MED, 2002) as one of four sectors with significant future economic implications for New Zealand. In its report for the New Zealand Film Commission on the *Lord of the Rings*

trilogy, the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER, 2002) found seven significant lasting effects, including:

- raising the international profile of the New Zealand screen production industry
- strong growth of foreign production financing
- enhanced New Zealand brand
- a strong foundation of screen production entrepreneurship
- broadening and deepening film related infrastructure
- potential spin off industries such as merchandise
- upskilling the industry at both technical and management levels.

The film industry relies to some extent on the beautiful environment of New Zealand. Economically it is in the industry's best interest to ensure continued access to this environment and ensure that it is not damaged. New Zealand screen production companies would claim that they comply with all applicable environmental legislation and requirements but they were apparently unaware of the extent of engagement of the large overseas screen production companies operating with environmentally and socially responsible practices.

The BBC, The Walt Disney Company, Time Warner and Vivendi Universal have all recently made high profile productions using New Zealand film locations. These overseas screen production companies are not being challenged to demonstrate that they are applying their own environmental performance standards to their operations in New Zealand.

2 Greening the Screen

In February 2005, *Greening the Screen* began as a partnership project between the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment, Landcare Research, Waitakere City Council and New Zealand production company South Pacific Pictures Ltd. The main purpose of the project was to develop environmental guidelines for the New Zealand screen production industry with the intention to:

- Encourage screen production companies to strive to improve their environmental performance;
- help protect New Zealand's natural, historical and cultural heritage and the value of the 'clean green New Zealand' brand;
- contribute to sustainable economic growth in the screen production industry;
- enhance the reputation and competitiveness of the screen production industry;
- support the adoption of environmentally responsible practices;
- demonstrate sector-wide leadership in corporate environmental responsibility.

The *Greening the Screen* guidelines (Smith and McConachy, 2005) were launched in the form of an environmental toolkit at the New Zealand Screen Production and Development Association's (SPADA) annual conference in November 2005.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the successful processes followed by the *Greening the Screen* project to sector-wide ensure engagement and uptake, and consider their potential application to other sectors.

2.1 Research and Development

During a survey of Auckland businesses conducted by Landcare Research, South Pacific Pictures was identified as a company already implementing changes to improve their environmental performance. These were mainly energy efficiency initiatives triggered by the power shortages New Zealand experienced in 2001 and 2003. South Pacific Pictures expressed a keen interest in learning about other environmental measures they could adopt and agreed to be both a pilot company and a partner in a proposal to develop environmental guidelines for the New Zealand screen production industry.

For Phase one of the project, funding was secured from the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Waitakere City Council under a memorandum of understanding between four project partners: MfE, Landcare Research, Waitakere City Council and South Pacific Pictures Ltd. Landcare Research also contributed matching funding under its Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST) funded research programme - Building Capacity for Sustainable Development. The four partner organisations formed a steering group that met regularly to guide the project activities and monitor progress. In Phase two of the project, environmental guidelines were published as the *Greening the Screen* Environmental Toolkit (Smith and McConachy, 2005) and a prototype website was established in partnership with SPADA.

Before beginning work on the guidelines, the project team set out to gain an in-depth understanding of the screen production industry and its environmental impacts. At the time, this was relatively new research for New Zealand, as the environmental impacts of screen production had not previously been studied in any detail.

A full time researcher was placed with South Pacific Pictures for a period of five months. The researcher undertook a full environmental review of South Pacific Pictures' corporate office and two of their key productions, 'Shortland Street' (McConachy and Smith, 2005a) and the feature film 'Sione's Wedding' (McConachy and Smith, 2005b). The project set clear confidentiality agreements for the pilot company which afforded the researcher unrestricted access to all parts of the company and its records ensuring that the review was both comprehensive and accurate.

The involvement of South Pacific Pictures itself was also a key factor in the success of the project as their commitment to the project encouraged other companies and screen production professionals to provide input to the development of the environmental toolkit. South Pacific Pictures' general manager (at the time) is held in very high regard by the New Zealand screen production industry and he sits on a number of influential boards and committees where he promoted the concept of *Greening the Screen* and the work being done at South Pacific Pictures. This facilitated access to many other screen production organisations and industry associations during the consultation stages of the project.

2.2 Process for screen production industry engagement

The process followed for the development of the *Greening the Screen* environmental toolkit proved to be extremely successful. The following account details the steps followed during the project.

2.2.1 Desk study review of environmental management in the industry both nationally and overseas with tangible examples relevant to the sector

The desk study provided tangible examples of initiatives already being undertaken by screen production companies and productions elsewhere in the world, i.e. the environmental management measures offered during the consultation stage were not only those expected of industry in general but could be justified with examples of their implementation by the screen production industry elsewhere in the world. It was important to be able to refer to examples from similar sized organisations from the same sector. The desk study informed both the development of opportunities for South Pacific Pictures and the content of the toolkit. It also enabled the project to evaluate sustainable development in the screen production industry worldwide and to identify a benchmark for where the New Zealand industry is placed among worldwide standards.

2.2.2 The recruitment of a pilot company and the identification of a company champion to take ownership of the project within the company

It was at this stage that the scope of the project within South Pacific Pictures was determined with the agreement of key issues such as company confidentiality. Although it was not an explicit intention when developing the proposal for the project, recruiting a pilot company considered to be a leader in its sector with considerable influence through its involvement in key industry organisations was a key success factor for *Greening the Screen*. The studio manager was identified as the company environmental champion. It was important that the company champion developed ownership for the project within the company. The company champion was responsible for informing the wider company about the project and facilitating employee participation.

2.2.3 Embedding a researcher with sector knowledge in the company to work alongside the company champion

An important sensitivity in the screen production industry is the perception of those outside the industry of the glamour associated with screen production – this is often referred to as “star-gazing”. Embedding an industry-experienced researcher in the company and restricting the access of other external project personnel was an important factor in gaining the confidence of the company and almost certainly facilitated access to production staff. For other industry sectors, this step would be important in establishing credibility of the researcher, acknowledging the contribution of that sector to the economy and society, demonstrating respect for the professional skills required, and expressing excitement for achievements of that industry sector.

2.2.4 Establishing a baseline against which to demonstrate future improvement in environmental performance

An environmental review was undertaken after mapping company activities, scoping the data to be collected and the methodology for collecting it. The review was dependent on the support of the company champion and cooperation of employees from all areas of the company. The review produced a large amount of data relevant to the environmental impacts of the company. These findings were publicised internally to generate solutions and as a stimulus for action. By undertaking a comprehensive environmental review with the pilot company, a model for future environmental reviews within the sector was developed. This was translated into a

planning tool for the environmental toolkit and website that assists production companies to map environmental impacts for individual productions, identify opportunities for improving environmental performance and potential mitigations.

A key factor in the success of the environmental review was ensuring confidentiality of the information gathered for the review and subsequent investigations. Although the research was for the benefit of the wider screen production industry, confidentiality was crucial so that the pilot company could manage any negative outcomes arising from the review. The confidentiality agreement provided South Pacific Pictures with prior opportunity to review information provided to the *Greening the Screen* steering group without hindering the wider goals of the project.

2.2.5 Investigating and implementing opportunities

The main environmental impacts of the company's screen production activities became opportunities that were investigated further to collect information about the nature of the impact and possible solutions. A template for reporting each investigation was established to include: baseline information summarising the environmental impacts and related costs, potential environmental improvements explaining why the environmental issue is of concern and the benefits expected to result from improving environmental performance; comparison of options describing the various options for improving environmental performance and evaluating each in terms of environmental benefits and costs; summary for each option of the findings of the investigation in terms of costs, savings and pay-back periods likely to arise from the opportunity; and further information providing the internet addresses for key organisations and sources of further information.

2.2.6 Consulting key industry organisations

Once the review of international practice was completed and prior to any publication about the project, members of the steering group visited the key screen industry bodies such as the NZ Screen Council, the NZ Film Commission, Film NZ, the Screen Directors Guild of NZ and the NZ Film and Video Technicians Guild. This was essentially a courtesy call to inform them about the project, to seek their agreement to participate in consultation on the proposed environmental guidelines, and to explore appropriate ways that those organisations could contribute to *Greening the Screen* in the future. In effect, this step provided the project team with a "licence to operate" within the sector. These organisations were also given the opportunity to review the toolkit and provide feedback before its launch.

2.2.7 Consulting across the sector

A workshop was organised with industry professionals representing the various crafts within the screen production sector; for example: lighting, camera, makeup, wardrobe, art etc. The workshop was facilitated by a highly respected industry leader and was also attended by the (then) general manager from South Pacific Pictures and the producer of the feature film, 'Sione's Wedding'. Their participation made the event more attractive and ensured a good turnout. The workshop took place at an early stage in the development of the guidelines. The key findings from the review of international practice were presented and discussed. The potential structure, functionality and content for the proposed guidelines were explored. Those individuals unable to attend the workshop were visited or contacted to ensure that

their feedback was captured. Significant contributions came from the workshop and subsequent follow-up that helped to shape the toolkit.

The resultant toolkit is designed in stand-alone sections for different audiences:

- **The Business Case** – explains the importance of corporate environmental responsibility for senior managers and business leaders.
- **Management** – provides instructions for identifying and managing environmental impacts.
- **Tools** – provide simple explanations, suggestions for improving environmental practices and a menu of common sense tips for different screen production activities:
 - Office
 - Behind the screen
 - Location
 - On screen
 - Off screen

Throughout the toolkit, screen production examples illustrate environmental opportunities and benefits in practice. The appendices provide a range of environmental management tools and resources tailored for the screen production industry.

2.2.8 Celebrating and acknowledging all contributions at a launch

The *Greening the Screen* project and the environmental toolkit were launched in November 2005 at SPADA's annual conference by Steve Maharey, Minister for Broadcasting. Presentations were made by the (then) general manager of South Pacific Pictures and the chair of the Landcare Research board who was also a board member of national public broadcaster Television New Zealand (TVNZ). Copies of the environmental toolkit, a shorter 'business case' document, and *Greening the Screen* t-shirts were distributed during the conference. The *Greening the Screen* website was made publicly available on this date. Press releases were sent out and subsequently all four project partners were acknowledged in most of the publicity and articles that followed from the launch. All the industry organisations that endorsed the toolkit published information about *Greening the Screen* on their websites and some included information about the launch in their newsletters.

2.2.9 Embedding good environmental practice in the sector

One of the serious concerns that emerged from consultation with screen production professionals was that publication of the toolkit and website would not be sufficient to ensure that good environmental practices became embedded in the screen production industry. They felt that further support would be required to enable other companies and productions to implement the toolkit and thereby create sufficient traction for *Greening the Screen* to become expected best practice across the sector.

With support from the Ministry for the Environment the project received a further eighteen months of funding to support industry associations, production companies and professionals to implement the toolkit, while at the same time further documenting New Zealand case studies to add to the website.

In the longer term, it is recognised that the project needs to be owned and managed by the sector although access to environmental management expertise will still be required. To ensure that *Greening the Screen* is fully integrated in the screen

production sector, work has begun to hold workshops with Regional Film Offices, to include relevant material in film school curricula, to integrate environmental considerations into the screen industry Code of Practice for Health and Safety, to develop environmental screen production awards, and to develop sector specific environmental performance indicators and reporting.

2.2.10 Outcomes

The key outcomes from the project were:

- Identification of the environmental impacts associated with screen production in New Zealand.
- Overall improvement of South Pacific Pictures environmental performance, including reduction and offsetting of carbon dioxide emissions from the company's key production *Shortland Street*.
- Industry acknowledgement of its environmental impacts and the need for change.
- High level of industry support and buy-in.
- Linking the screen production industry and the relevant environmental agencies/organisations that are able to provide support.
- Developing a sector-specific toolkit the only one of its kind for screen production in the world.
- Recruiting screen production companies who wish to become involved in the project and implement the toolkit.
- Building capacity within the screen production industry to take responsibility for managing its environmental impacts and in turn creating another reason why New Zealand is one of the best film locations in the world.
- Working with the screen production industry to protect the environment for the benefit of every New Zealander and future generations to come.

3 Discussion

When the *Greening the Screen* project was initiated New Zealand had few resources for the environmental sustainability of its screen production industry, and was clearly lagging behind overseas standards in this area. *Greening the Screen* is a successful model that has provided New Zealand screen production with tools to improve its environmental performance, and it may be the first of its kind in the world.

The project worked with a major screen production company and successfully reduced the environmental impact of its activities while obtaining cost savings. The main aim of the project was for the industry to accept sustainability as an important consideration in its future activities.

“We all recognise the importance of preserving and protecting our environment. South Pacific Pictures exposure to Greening the Screen has brought home to us how we can actually make a difference. With very little effort we can make significant improvements to the way we use resources while we reduce our waste. And to our surprise we have realised that whilst we make these improvements and reductions we are going to save money. We’re very excited to have lead the Greening the Screen project and we’re

absolutely committed to achieving results that will help us and the environment.”
 (John Barnett, South Pacific Pictures)

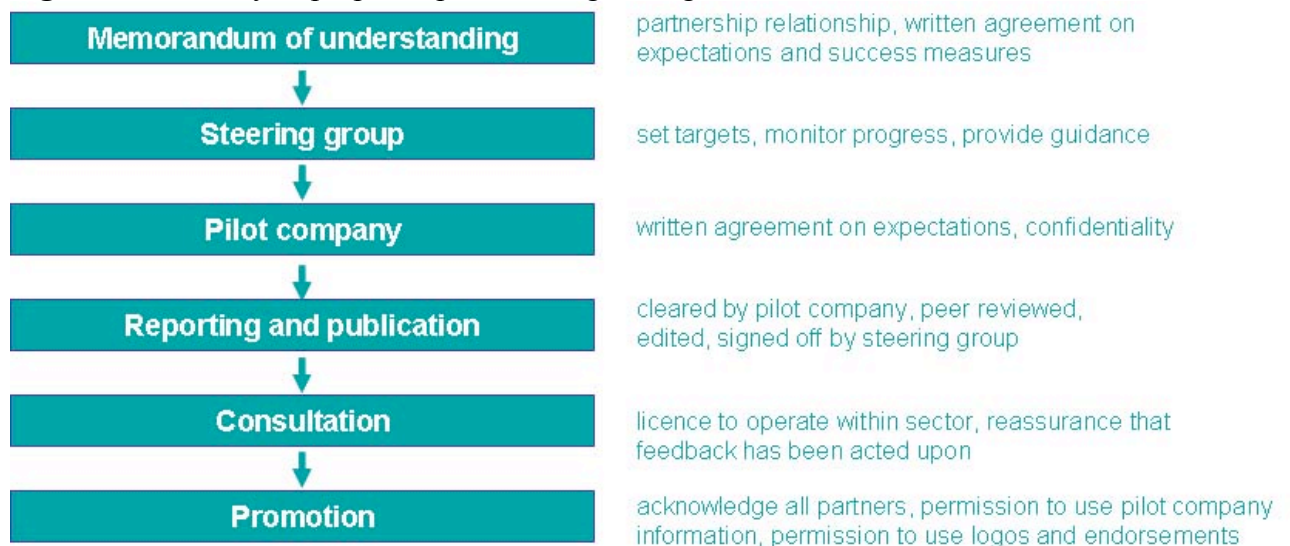
With the example set by South Pacific Pictures, this is currently happening. Many screen production companies are recognising the advantages of sustainable practices and are beginning to implement the *Greening the Screen* toolkit (Smith A and McConachy E, 2005).

Although much has been achieved there are still key pieces of work that the project team wishes to undertake to expose the industry even further to sustainable development. These involve:

- Expanding the industry health and safety code of practice to become health, safety and environmental code of practice
- Continuing to expand the work to include a variety of screen production companies from large broadcasters to small production houses.
- Documenting more New Zealand case studies for the *Greening the Screen* website
- Communicating important and relevant sustainability information, news and updates to the industry.
- Working with large organisations within the field such as public broadcasters to begin develop sustainability reports and to become more involved with the sustainable business community.
- Encouraging the industry to investigate opportunities for certification to national and overseas standards.

The *Greening the Screen* project can be considered as a working model that can be applied to other sectors. In using this model for future projects, the table below outlines the process that could applied to other sectors.

Figure 1: Summary of proposed process for greening a sector



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