



portable

The Creative Industries Innovation Centre (CIIC) produced this feature article for its website, Creativeinnovation.net.au, to showcase the experiences and knowledge of an innovative Australian creative company.

Based in Melbourne and New York, Portable is one of the most versatile studios in the landscape for digital and mobile content. Portable is a digital technology company that specialises in unearthing niche opportunities in the film, fashion and education sectors.

Established in 2006 by Simon Goodrich and Andrew Apostola, Portable's business model relies on creating content for digital and mobile channels.

This model was put to the test with the launch of YouTube, when it became apparent that consumers might not pay for

digital content if they could access it free of charge.

Nonetheless, Portable has thrived by diversifying its business model away from content-sales into client-based work, making it one of the most nimble players in the Australian landscape for digital content.

Its flagship platform, Portable Film Festival, attracts an audience of 75,000 viewers per week, while Swappler, a tool that helps fashion designers and retailers develop an online presence, has evolved into a fully-fledged development platform since its beta launch in 2009.

To complement revenue earned from these independent projects, Portable creates websites and digital content for clients such as 42 Below, Asahi, Foster's and Tourism Victoria.

What inspired you to launch Portable?

We believe there are moments in time when technology shapes culture, not the other way around. In 2005 when the iPod launched, it inspired us to create portable content for different devices. We launched Portable Film Festival one year later, which is a digital channel for short films and videos.

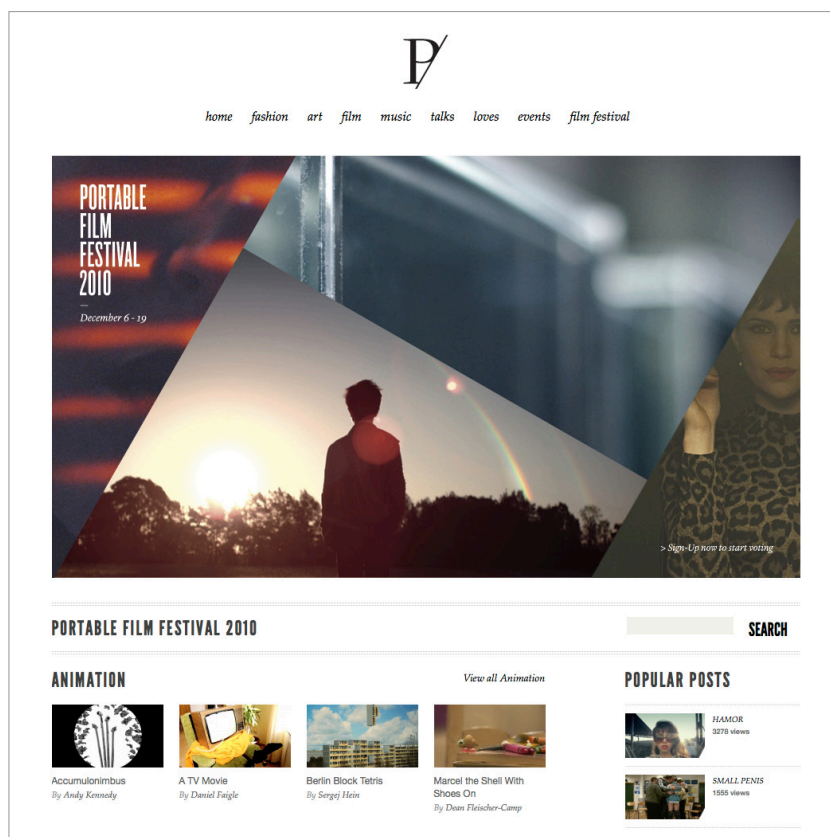
How did you calculate the risks/returns of entering this market?

Badly! Mobile content is an emerging area and one that we continue to innovate and trial new ideas, but the market is still quite small. The hype surrounding content sales fizzed as soon as YouTube hit the market and content became free, but luckily we'd already brought on external clients because we knew it was important to diversify. Today, Portable Film

Case study

Cover image:
Andrew Apostola and
Simon Goodrich.
Photography by
Mia Mala McDonald

This page:
Portable Film Festival
2010 website.



Festival covers its costs, but we make the bulk of our revenue from other projects. As a promotional tool for our company, however, it performs strongly – for every dollar we invest in Portable Film Festival, we receive \$3-\$4 back in client work.

How would you describe your business model?

It's part start-up and part service business. We work on projects that build their own revenue streams, such as Portable Film Festival, Swappler and Loom. Swappler allows fashion designers and retailers to create online stores; Loom is an interactive application targeted at the Education market.

The other half of our business is providing digital production and strategy to clients in related industries such as film, fashion, education and government. Only one client contributes more than 10% of our total revenue, which gives us a lot of stability.

What were your start-up costs?

We took out overdrafts against our own assets because it's faster than applying for venture capital, and to this day we maintain an overdraft to assist with the business. Our revenue is on track to rise above \$1 million in the 2009/10 financial year.

Your company has grown from 2 to 11 people in just three years. How have you managed that growth?

Providing job security has helped with creative thinking,

hence we tend to keep staff permanent and not as contractors. We feel this helps to build a culture for the business.

Are you on track to meet your business targets?

Yes, we review our budgets every fortnight – being in business for a few years helps to get some good indicators on what is sustainable growth.

What's your approach to risk and experimentation?

As long as you know when to pull the plug and you're not risking your core business, experimenting can open you up to new markets and industries. You only get a bite of the apple once, so prototyping is important. In terms of quality control, "beta" is a very important word. Getting a community to check and test something can be vastly beneficial. Just be clear where you are in the development / idea cycle when you bring somebody into the process.

What does creative thinking add to your clients' business?

We see it as what set us apart from other businesses. Otherwise we're just a boutique business in a relatively large city in a small country. For us, creativity is not doing what you've done before. It's about reading the market, researching and using your skill sets to come up with new ideas.

Is there anything you should have done differently?

The longer we go in the business the more we learn. We've done a lot of things to keep our business complicated but now we're now paring back, so if we had our time over we would have done less.

Within a few weeks of launching Portable Film Festival, we landed on the front page of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. In a lot of ways, we weren't ready as a business to respond to leverage this publicity, although it did land us some great opportunities with sponsors.

What are the primary traps for start-ups in this sector?

A wise friend told me, the only thing that happens quickly in business is spending your own money. So get used to it. You need to find clients quickly and have contingencies in place to deal with failure, because you will fail. We all do. There's nothing wrong with it, this is where you learn the most. Success doesn't allow you to be as critical as when something doesn't work, so failure can lead to greater successes in the future.

Have you been involved in collaborations with clients in other sectors?

We've worked in wine, mental health and sustainability. Nothing unusual really, all projects can be assisted by digital strategy.

What trends are driving your business?

I see an opportunity in the space created by the National Broadband Network (NBN), and the general move of core services to online and portable platforms.

We see the building of the NBN similar to putting electricity into the home for the first time without knowing what to use the sockets for. Where can you buy appliances, so to speak, for content? We see this as a massive opportunity for people in the digital space to fill this void. Once the NBN is built, there'll be a need for content, both for the system as well as assisting other services in making this transition.

What challenges do you face looking forward?

Cash flow is always a challenge as we invest in new ideas, as is keeping our staff happy by giving them a degree of autonomy for their own creative pursuits.

In February 2010, we opened a permanent office in New York. Filtering through what's good and what's just noise, as well as having the time to test and implement new technologies, is an ongoing challenge.

AT A GLANCE

Name:	Portable
Website:	www.portablecontent.com
Location:	Melbourne
Sector:	Digital Strategy
Launch:	2006
Directors:	Andrew Apostala (Creative director) & Simon Goodrich (Managing director)
Total staff 2009:	11 (plus 3 contractors)
Milestones:	Launched Portable Film Festival in 2006; Swappler in 2009; and Loom in 2010. Recognised by Smart Company as a "Next Big Thing" in February 2009.

Simon Goodrich is President of AIMIA's Victorian Chapter and a member of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. Andrew Apostala won the British Council Award in 2008, and was a Finalist at SOYA 2009 (Qantas Spirit of Youth Awards) for Visual Communication.

Article by Barbara Messer

ABOUT CIIC

The CIIC supports the business of creative enterprise. It is an Australian Government initiative, part of the Enterprise Connect program and is supported by the University of Technology, Sydney.

FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.creativeinnovation.net.au, www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au or call the CIIC on 02 8217 5000 to find out how we can help your creative business.