

Using Transmedia to Design Intellectual Property for a Game Company

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Tekijä Jussi Kyrönseppä	
Koulutusohjelma Tietojenkäsittelyn koulutusohjelma	
Opinnäytetyön otsikko Peliyhtiön aineettoman omaisuuden transmediasuunnittelu	Sivumäärä 34
Opinnäytetyön otsikko englanniksi Using Transmedia to Design Intellectual Property for a Game Company	
<p>Opinnäytetyö käsittelee transmediasuunnittelun suhdetta peliyhtiön aineettoman omaisuuden levinneisyyteen ja pitkäikäisyyteen. Tarkoituksena on ensisijaisesti kasvattaa asiantuntijuutta transmediasuunnittelun alalla. Tavoitteena on täten kehittää Stupid Stupid Games –yhtiön aineettoman omaisuuden pitkäikäisyyttä ja levinneisyyttä.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyö koostuu teoria- ja analyysiosuudesta. Teoriaosuudessa tarkastellaan Jesse Schellin, Jeff Gomezin, Tim Dowdin, Michael Fryn, Michael Niedermanin ja Josef Steiffin transmedia-kirjoituksia. Vertaamalla tekstejä tavoitteena oli löytää lyhyt lista faktoreita, joita kirjoittajat pitivät tärkeinä transmedian suunnitteluun. Analyysissä tutkija vertaa faktoreita viihdeyhtiöiden menestyneisiin tuotteisiin. Analyysi osoittaa, että faktoreilla on merkitystä tuotteiden pitkäikäisyyteen ja levinneisyyteen.</p> <p>Faktorit toimivat pohjana peliyhtiön aineettoman omaisuuden suunnittelun jatkotutkimukselle. Tuloksilla on ollut merkitystä Stupid Stupid Gamesin Johnny Graves –The Bastard Son of Satan –pelin suunnitteluun.</p>	
Asiasanat Transmedia, aineeton omaisuus, LEGO, Bionicle, Star Wars, Marvel, DC Comics.	

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Degree programme Business Information Technology	
Thesis title Using Transmedia to Design Intellectual Property for a Game Company	Number of pages 34
<p>This Bachelor's thesis examines the role of transmedia in regards to spreadability and longevity of the intellectual property for a game company. The primary goal is to gain experience in the field of transmedia design. The purpose is thus to develop the intellectual property of Stupid Stupid Games towards spreadability and growth.</p> <p>The thesis is made of theory section and an analysis section. The theory section examines the transmedia writings of Jesse Schell, Jeff Gomez, Tim Dowd, Michael Fry, Michael Niederman and Josef Steiff. The aim was to find similarities in the writings and to come up with a short list of factors that the authors considered crucial to transmedia. In the analysis section the author compares these factors to successful intellectual properties of entertainment companies. The analysis shows that the factors have a bearing on the longevity and spreadability of these properties.</p> <p>The factors work as a foundation for future studies in how to design content for video games as intellectual property. The results have had an impact on how Stupid Stupid Games designed content for Johnny Graves –The Bastard Son of Satan –computer game.</p>	
Keywords Transmedia, Intellectual property, LEGO, Bionicle, Star Wars, Marvel, DC Comics.	

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1 Introduction

What is the value of intellectual property for a game company? "IP is everything," said Ilari Kuittinen, the CEO of Housemarque in an interview I conducted for my ICT entrepreneurship studies in Haaga-Helia. (Kuittinen 2013.) These words stuck in my mind when I co-founded Stupid Stupid Games. The task of building a company with the strengths and experience of few IT-students seemed foolhardy and outlandish. I needed to find a competitive edge. I needed to find some way to make this business my own. I needed an idea, a strategy for the company. College had taught me the value of intellectual property for successful companies, but how did the Finnish game companies value their intellectual property and possibilities it presented? Kuittinen, a veteran of the Finnish game industry, confirmed what I had suspected for some time. There are plenty of ways to be relevant in the game industry, but the only way to make it big is to own the intellectual property rights for your game. Housemarque is a resilient and successful game company with an impressive track record. They have a good relationship with Sony and that's how they've gotten by. Even still they couldn't grow because their biggest hit Stardust couldn't really be licensed or expanded. It was an arcade game with no characters and only a faint whisper of a story. They had tried to cultivate a new game that would have had marketable characters, but the game failed to gain an audience. (Buffa 2012.)

Just a few miles away in Espoo Rovio was making a killing licensing Angry Birds, but I was left wondering why only sell soda bottles, towels, hoodies and miscellaneous bric-a-brac. Where was the cool stuff like comics and animation series? Where was the adventure? I had read an Angry Birds comic book and I couldn't help but be amazed by the poor quality of it. It told me nothing about the birds. Quite frankly it felt disconnected. But Rovio was hiring developers as fast as they could, the heat was on and it was time to grow. I was expecting a big splash, a big game that would tell me all I wanted to know about the birds. The splash never came. Maybe it was a conscious decision not to expand Angry Birds into a storyworld, but I was dumbfounded. Surely the masters of licensing would understand the benefits of a spreadable storyworld. So why didn't they do it? Could it be possible that they didn't know how?

Just few weeks after the Housemarque interview, I got an opportunity to sit down with Lauri Hyvärinen, the CEO of Frozenbyte, the company that made Trine and Trine 2. I asked him the same question as I had asked Ilari Kuittinen: What is the value of intellectual property for a game company? Lauri's answer couldn't have been more different. Hyvärinen laughed and said he had some furry toys in the garage, but they weren't about to sell them. They wanted to make quality games, not sell stuff like the folks across the

bay. (Hyvärinen 2013.) Rovio is located just across the bay from the offices of Frozenbyte. It seemed strange to me, because Trine had an audience; the game had a beautiful world and characters. It had a story. Surely you could expand Trine and give the fans more stories. As it turned out later they had made more. Before we left the Frozenbyte office Lauri gave us free games with autographs and a copy of Professor Snackfridge's Field Journal Vol. 2. It is a beautifully coloured humorous rendering of Professor Sandrew Snackfridge's scientific study of the Wildmagic Forest. I wondered if there was a rich treasure, a marketable intellectual property, buried somewhere in the Wildmagic Forest. If only someone knew how to go and find it and expand it properly.

Was it really all that difficult to extend game company's intellectual property in a way that wouldn't feel disconnected or out of character? How could you stay true to your game and your initial vision and still flood the market with licensed merchandise, comics, films and theme parks? How could I, as the creative director for Stupid Stupid Games, design a storyworld, an intellectual property that would have scalability? Could it be possible to design an immaterial product? I already had a basic knowledge of product design as I was specializing in designing digital services in Haaga-Helia. As I set out to find the answers I realized that nobody had them. I couldn't just buy a book and learn this stuff. I had to find my own answers and maybe I should look farther than just game companies.

1.1 Background

Digital revolution began in the 1980's as mobile phones and the internet found their way to consumers. Back then it was difficult to foresee just how these possibilities would change the lives of ordinary people. In just few decades we have come from novelties like a text based internet and briefcase sized mobile phones to a situation where over half of the world's population have mobile phones and every fourth person has access to internet. Digitalisation has had a profound effect on how people earn and consume and the change is far from over. Daily choices on how we lead our lives are being influenced by digitalisation in ever increasing speed. A fine example is how people have adopted computer games, a purely digital form of media. In the late 2000's there were 183 million gamers in the United States. There were over 200 million gamers in China and over 105 million in India. In Europe there were over 100 million gamers and the numbers are growing. (McGonigal 2011, 3.) Organizations and citizens across the board are spending more of their time online. Nowadays it is rare to find a company that doesn't offer any online services at all.

Different media platforms have been on the forefront of the digital revolution. Personal computers became popular largely because of computer games. Online commerce has been largely defined by popular P2P file sharing and the war between large media companies and consumers. Despite fears, the internet hasn't killed off the music industry and Hollywood is still alive and churning out new movies. But digitalisation has changed the way these companies conduct their business.

As the digital revolution has progressed the question of books have often come about. Will the printed book survive? Will literacy vanish from the face of the earth? Jeff Gomez, the CEO of a New York based production company Starlight Runner Entertainment is one of the leading transmedia advisors in the world. He has helped companies like Microsoft, Disney and Coca Cola to navigate in the digital frontier. In an interview he gave at The London Book Fair Digital Minds Conference in 2012 he said he felt relief in the fact that publishers are waking up to the possibilities of digitalisation. Mobile phones and tablets are no longer perceived as a threat but as a possibility to keep storytelling as a profitable business. (Gomez 2012.)

It is fair to say that the media companies have struggled to find a foothold in our new brave and digital world. One could go as far as to say it has been a downright crisis. In our modern world of licensing business and ubiquitous computing owning an intellectual property that has spreadability over media is a veritable goldmine.

1.1.1 Intellectual Property

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) defines intellectual property (IP) as follows: Intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.

As different types of intellectual property WIPO lists: copyright, patents, trademarks, industrial designs and geographical indications. (WIPO 2014.)

David Greenspan, S. Gregory Boyd and Jas Purewal consider IP to be the lifeline of the video game industry. In their article for WIPO magazine (Greenspan, Boyd & Purewal 2014) they write that the IP rights associated with video games are the tools for making the games and the content of the game. They breakdown the IP rights for the games, but for our purposes (transmedia design) only story and characters fall within our focus.

In this thesis intellectual property is defined as content and more specifically story and characters. It is a common practice in game industry to refer to content in a game or a series as intellectual property or IP for short (Bernstein 2013).

1.1.2 Transmedia

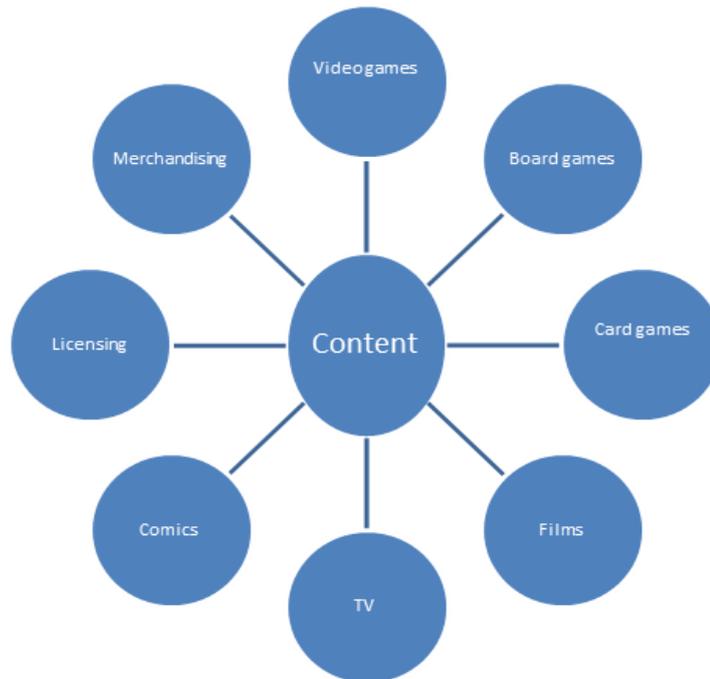
Neither Oxford's nor Merriam-Webster's online dictionaries, at the time of writing, have an entry for transmedia. Yet it is a term that is commonly used in entertainment business every day. Even a few books have been written about the subject. Perhaps the problem is that transmedia is used to describe many different things and all with conviction. Most commonly it is used to describe the content that is dispersed over many media channels. But apart from that there is no established meaning latched on to the term. It is used to describe processes in film-making, television production, marketing, merchandizing and advertising to name a few. In many cases it is comparable to cross-media, multimedia or multiplatform storytelling. (Dowd, T, Fry, M., Niederman, M. & Steiff, J.2013, 3.) In recent years Hollywood has started to describe blockbuster movies and all its possible spinoffs as transmedia. For others it is a term that refers to the interactive aspects of media. (Phillips 2012, 13 – 14.)

A very popular, but much debated definition was written by Henry Jenkins, a provost professor at the University of Southern California, who defined transmedia storytelling as a process where the story elements are systematically dispersed over multiple channels. He further iterates that each medium ideally makes its own contribution to the story. (Jenkins 2007 & Jenkins 2011.)

Producers Guild of America in their code of credits for new media defines transmedia as a narrative project or a franchise with at least three (or more) storylines within the same fictional universe. They specifically mention that the storylines must not be adaptations of the same storyline. (Producers Guild of America 2014.)

For the purpose of this thesis I will use the term transmedia in reference to one intellectual property (as defined above) spread over many media channels. I will specifically use the term transmedia as it functions as a tool for narrative design to create aforementioned intellectual property.

Figure 1. Transmedia can most accurately be described as content distributed over many media platforms



1.2 Purpose

In my work as a creative director for Stupid Stupid Games my goal is to create a story universe that has longevity and spreadability. Expertise gained in the field of transmedia design and specifically how it pertains to designing intellectual property can be also used for the benefit of other companies. Satisfactory instructions and guidelines for creating a story universe for a game company's intellectual property are missing. So I am trying to create a practical set of rules for intellectual property design for a game company, which would also serve as the basis for future research. Transmedia offers the tools of creating a narrative design as a product that could be offered to customers through several access points.

1.3 Objectives

The objective of this research is to find factors in transmedia that affect the design of intellectual property of game companies in terms of longevity and spreadability.

1.4 Research questions and scope

Intention of this research is not to define transmedia and its possibilities fully for academic purposes. Nor will I look at transmedia as a marketing device. My aim is to look at transmedia as a tool for intellectual property design and specifically if it has bearing on the spreadability and longevity of a media franchise.

- What factors are prerequisites for good transmedia design?
- Does the design of intellectual property as transmedia affect its longevity and spreadability?

2 Research methodology

I will comb through the ideas of three different publications on transmedia design. I wanted to find well researched but practical advice, so all chosen authors have at one time or another created and taught or lectured on transmedia. By comparing these ideas I am able to create a short list of factors that the writers have deemed relevant for creating transmedia properties. I will look at two sets of transmedia properties and compare them to my short list of factors. I used the following criteria for choosing the target properties:

- All the properties have publications in at least three different mediums.
- They are all successful.
- The two compared properties were in direct competition and in a similar market situation.

Bionicle and Star Wars are comparable because they were the two of the tree most popular LEGO between the years 2000 - 2010. (Robertson 2012; LEGO 2014). I am interested in why was Bionicle discontinued while Star Wars have continued to become and even more successful. Both are properties that have movies, comics, toys and games.

Marvel and DC Comics are the two most prominent superhero publishers in the world (Armitage 2014). The rivalry between the companies has existed since the 1930's and both companies have very strong and similar intellectual properties that have been nurtured for decades. Superhero properties are very applicable to games, movies and comics. They live in storyworlds that have clear game-like rules.

3 Transmedia design

What goes into designing a transmedia property? How to design a video game, but only in terms of characters and story as intellectual property so that it has spreadability already designed into it? How to design content for a media franchise so that it makes sense with its many iterations over multitude of mediums?

There is some academic research available on transmedia storytelling, but none of it is directly applicable to designing a new intellectual property, a story universe that could be accessed through different mediums. While the research gives a good theoretical background it offers little in terms of practical advice to a game designer. I have chosen as my sources three publications by people who have at one point have created transmedia.

- Jesse Schell: *The Art of Game Design. The Book of Lenses*
- Jeff Gomez: *Whole new worlds: Transmedia storytelling opens licensing vistas*
- Tim Dowd, et al: *Storytelling Across Worlds*

I examine their claims into how to design transmedia. They all tell a little different story, though not without some similarities. My aim is to examine these all and find the similarities. From these I will form my own synthesis as to what I see are the necessities of designing a transmedia universe.

3.1 Jesse Schell: The Art of Game Design

Jesse Schell is the CEO of Schell Games. He is also Professor at ETC at Carnegie Mellon University. (Schell Games 2014.)

In his book *The Art of Game Design. The Book of Lenses* Schell describes his thoughts on transmedia. He sees transmedia world as a powerful tool for game designers to increase engagement with players. He also believes that if done right, a transmedia world can be very profitable for a long period of time. As examples he offers transmedia properties such as James Bond, Star Trek, Star Wars, Transformers and Lord of the Rings. He also describes Walt Disney as one of the first entrepreneurs to experiment with transmedia. (Schell 2008, 303 – 304.)

Schell distinctly separates the game and the game world. The game is just one of the gateways into the game world. He offers us a list of characteristics that he believes successful transmedia worlds have in common. (Schell 2008, 307.)

3.1.1 Transmedia worlds evolve over time

Jesse Schell writes that successful transmedia needs to evolve over time. As an example he describes the evolution of Sherlock Holmes, whose trademark deerstalker hat and calabash pipe were not in Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories. Sherlock Holmes stories have been reworked by many writers over a long period of time and this has helped it to become a popular transmedia property. As another successful example he offers us Santa Claus. He describes briefly how several writers have over time; some more successfully than others, reworked the character. He also goes on to explain that new features that enter a transmedia world are decided by public opinion. Some ideas have more stickiness than others. (Schell 2008, 304 – 305.)

3.1.2 They tend to be rooted in a single medium

According to Schell transmedia properties are strongest at their original form. Despite the fact that the properties spread out through different mediums, the first splash was made through one medium. As examples he mentions Sherlock Holmes as a serialized fiction. Star Wars was first a movie and only later grew into a complete media franchise as Star Wars the extended universe. He also mentions Star Trek, which premiered as a TV-series and only later expanded into film and games. Pokémon was originally a handheld game, but has since gone on to triumphant success as a TV-series and as a card game. (Schell 2008, 305.)

3.1.3 They are intuitive

Schell offers us a brief story of when he was doing research for Toontown Online; he wanted to learn as much about the fictional world of Toontown as possible. As he studied the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, where Toontown was originally introduced he realized that the film didn't really describe Toontown in detail. All the cartoon characters lived in the same town for the first time, yet nobody seemed to think this as odd. "Without anyone ever expressively saying it, it was somehow common knowledge that all cartoon characters live together in a cartoon universe that is very different than ours." He goes on to say that the creators of Batman and Superman surely didn't mean these characters to live together in the same universe, yet now they do. (Schell 2008, 305 – 306.)

3.1.4 They have a creative individual at their core

Schell lists Walt Disney, Shigeru Miyamoto, L. Frank Baum, Tajiri Satoshi and George Lucas as examples of creators of successful transmedia worlds. He also mentions that sometimes small, tight teams are able to create successful worlds. He believes that the holistic vision of a world that comes to the creator gives the vision strength, solidity, integrity, and beauty necessary for a sustainable transmedia universe. (Schell 2008, 306.)

3.1.5 They facilitate the telling of many stories

Successful transmedia worlds are not about one story. It is never just about one book or one film. Transmedia stories are designed in a way which allows the stories they facilitate to be told over many iterations. This allows many future stories and brings longevity into the property. This also makes it possible for a one transmedia world to have many writers, directors and producers. It is no longer on the shoulders of one creative individual. (Schell 2008, 306.)

3.1.6 They make sense through any of their gateways

As a successful example of making sense through many gateways, Schell offers Pokémon, which makes perfect sense through its Nintendo games, TV shows, comics, video and card games. He believes that any of these offers a good entry point into the property. (Schell 2008, 306.)

As a counterexample he offers us the world of The Matrix, which became so convoluted with its parallel storytelling through different mediums that in the end even the movies were hard to understand. (Schell 2008, 306.)

3.1.7 They are all about wish fulfillment

Schell believes that viewers and gamers are not willing to invest time and effort into a new fictional property if it doesn't offer the reward of wish fulfillment. The world needs to be a place the player wants to visit. (Schell 2008, 306.)

3.2 Jeff Gomez: Whole new worlds: Transmedia storytelling opens licensing vistas

Jeff Gomez is the CEO of Starlight Runner Entertainment. The company is the leading producer of transmedia franchises. Their clients include Coca-Cola, 20th Century Fox, Microsoft, The Walt Disney Company, Campbell's, Viacom, Sony Entertainment, Showtime, Mattel, Hasbro, Ubisoft, Scholastic and the U.S. government. (Starlight Runner Entertainment 2014.)

Jeff Gomez has extensive knowledge of transmedia having also worked on Magic the Gathering for Wizards of The Coast, where he dramatized the mythology of the cards and extended the storyline across a series of comic book titles, websites and videogames. Gomez developed Mattel's Hot Wheels animation universe which extended over comic books, TV-series and video games. (Henry Jenkins 2008) Gomez's work and seminars can be found in Variety, Forbes, BusinessWeek, Wired UK, Los Angeles Times, and several other newspapers and blogs. (Starlight Runner Entertainment 2014.)

Jeff Gomez has been very open about transmedia storytelling, the way he thinks it ought to be done and the possibilities of it all. His key ideas come across in an article he wrote for KidScreen. In this article he mentions 4 key steps when designing a transmedia property. (Gomez 2010.)

3.2.1 Prepare for multi-platform by expanding the story world

Gomez begins by stressing that it is vital to understand the story world. What are the vision, themes, characters and the central narrative of the intellectual property? Once the vision is clear in the creator's mind he claims that everything should stem from this vision and it can be maintained by following these suggestions:

- The essence of the property should be at the heart of every distribution iteration. Every product designed around the IP should contain the vision.
- He stresses the importance of following the canon of the fictional universe through every distribution iteration. He believes that the presence of the property's theme gives every new addition its authenticity.
- Gomez writes that it is important to create a world that feels real and larger than is presented. The world must have rules, history, culture and slang.
- Gomez iterates that well realized world is directly linked to the longevity of the property for it allows future stories and characters. Yet it is important to keep these grounded to the essence of the property. (Gomez 2010, 2.)

3.2.2 Maintain the IP with transmedia planning

According to Gomez it is important to have a creative visionary at the heart of creation. He mentions George Lucas, James Cameron and J. J. Abrams as such visionaries. But it is not enough to create a vision; it also needs to be executed. For a storyworld to become fully realized as transmedia it needs to be transported to many mediums. He goes on to explain the work of a transmedia producer who needs to understand the special requirements for different mediums. He compares this profession to an orchestra conductor who is in charge of coordinating the different iterations. (Gomez 2010, 2 – 3.)

3.2.3 Maximize value by assembling a franchise clearinghouse

Gomez explains the work of franchise clearinghouse as a steward of the property. The steward is trusted to uphold the integrity of the property, to make sure it stays consistent and logical through every distribution iteration. The customers are unlikely to buy the same story over and over again, though through different medium. Each distribution iteration must bring something new and a fresh for the consumer. Gomez describes how Disney, Sony and Microsoft Game Studios have task forces that work together to maintain the integrity of the vision and secure a smooth execution. These task forces act as stewards of the original vision and make sure that the property stays logical and fresh for the consumer. (Gomez 2010, 3 – 4.)

3.2.4 Build brand equity by validating audience participation

Gomez believes that the best way to keep a property fresh and interesting is to listen to the customer. He goes as far as saying these core fans are the driving force behind the property. Gomez writes that transmedia is all about two-way communication and listening

to the customer is essential for the success of the property. He states that the channels for listening should be designed into the product from the beginning. (Gomez 2010, 4.)

3.3 Tim Dowd, Michael Fry, Michael Niederman & Josef Steiff: Storytelling Across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers

Tom Dowd is the associate professor of interactive arts & media at Columbia College Chicago. He is also the co-creator, writer and producer for Shadowrun, the tabletop roleplaying game turned into transmedia. (Kirby, M. 2014.)

Michael Fry is an Emmy-nominated writer and producer. He is also an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago. He teaches writing for television, the internet and transmedia. (Columbia College. 2014.)

Michael Niederman is the chair of the Television Department of Columbia College Chicago. He is also an award winning film and video maker. He teaches writing, directing and transmedia. He writes and lectures on television, popular culture and emerging narrative forms. (Columbia College. 2014.)

Josef Steiff is the associate chair and professor of Film & Video at Columbia College Chicago. He teaches screenwriting and transmedia. He has also worked as a writer, director and producer for several independent films. (Columbia College. 2014.)

In their book *Storytelling Across Worlds* authors Dowd, Fry, Niederman & Steiff present a very detailed description of transmedia. It is a how to book that was partly written out of their own involvement in transmedia but also out of discussions with their graduate and undergraduate students. Many industry professionals had also expressed their wish for a book like this since the idea of transmedia was hard to communicate for the fact that it is a relatively complex affair that requires knowledge of several different media disciplines. They also make the claim that while transmedia is a new design paradigm many of the old rules still apply when creating media content. Transmedia is a new way of thinking, a new approach that is available for makers. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, xiii – xiv.)

3.3.1 One World, Many Stories

Dowd, Fry, Niederman & Steiff see the concept of “one world, many stories” as the pillar of transmedia storytelling. They see the world as an intellectual property or as a concept

that as a rule has many distribution iterations and “stories”. They believe the world must be spacious and detailed. As a conceived concept it must allow for growth over time or have the ability to be slightly different in its different distribution iterations. They also state that they believe the world should have familiarity and they should resonate with the audience thematically. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 21-22.)

3.3.2 Cornerstone platform/property

Dowd & al state that they have very little doubt that every transmedia property has one cornerstone, one primary form, which serves as the main access point for the intellectual property. Other forms serve to support this. Even with a holistic transmedia approach to the property with many access points the primary form takes precedence. They go on to explain that some of the functions for the primary form are to establish the rules, themes, primary characters and aesthetic style of the property. The primary form is not necessarily the first published part of the property. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 27.)

3.3.3 Understanding the medium

When considering the different mediums for the cornerstone of the property understanding the pros and cons of the mediums is necessary. Dowd & al iterate the advantages and disadvantages of television, comics, webisodes, films and video games. Understanding these helps the creators to choose the primary form for the property. Other things besides storytelling aspects should also be considered. Dowd & al give great deal of attention to audience demographics. In choosing the primary form it is important to weigh in the target audience. Once the primary form is chosen careful consideration should be given to the production timeline. Different mediums have different time requirements for production and these factors should be considered to ensure a well-timed publication schedule. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 28 – 29.)

3.3.4 Transmedia bible

As the transmedia world expands over several mediums it becomes difficult to oversee all the work. To maintain the integrity of the property it is necessary to communicate the essence of it to everyone involved. It becomes essential to create a transmedia intellectual property bible. Dowd & al writes that there is no one correct way to create such a document, but they do offer some details as to what goes into a transmedia bible. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 263 – 264.)

Everything that could possibly be important to creators working on the property goes into the bible. The bible becomes the main source of information for all developers. According to Dowd & al the document should establish continuity, setting, character, key story elements and the rules of the universe. Also key design elements should be found inside the bible. The document can also include important logistical information, technical information, business plan and marketing strategy. It becomes a comprehensive reference guide to the whole intellectual property. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 263 – 264.)

3.3.5 Engagement

Dowd & al consider the participatory element to be an intrinsic and exciting element of transmedia storytelling. They perceive transmedia having “co-creators” and “collaborators” instead of “writer” and a “reader”. As far as the transmedia goes they make a distinction between marketing where participation can be considered as advertising the property and actual design of transmedia where participation is embedded into the property. They also make the distinction that transmedia is not about giving a taste of what is to come, but are actual relevant storylines of the property. If you know your audience and can spark their imagination they will become co-creators and torchbearers that can span your property and keep it relevant for year to come. (Dowd, T & al. 2013, 30 – 31.)

3.4 Synthesis

Most of the ideas presented by the writers are very similar so some consensus does exist on what is transmedia and how it is created and managed. All writers work in creating or have at some point created transmedia products, so many of the ideas are very practical. In some cases the ideas were more general and were in regards to the nature of transmedia. The ideas presented by the authors were slightly different, but similar enough to fall under the same heading. Only on one subject there was no clear consensus.

3.4.1 Write the world, not a story

All writers agreed that the emphasis should be on world creation so that the property can facilitate many stories. This allows for growth and longevity. Also according to Gomez and Dowd & al. the fictional world needs to be large and rich in details. It needs to have rules, a culture, history and future to sustain credibility as it spreads across many mediums.

3.4.2 Strong message

According to Gomez transmedia worlds need to have a strong theme and a vision to resonate with the audience. Dowd & al. speak of the need to spark the imagination of the audience. Schell also speaks to that effect when he says he believes that transmedia worlds have a creative individual at the core of the holistic vision. He mentions that sometimes a small team can create that as well.

3.4.3 Maintain consistency

Schell does not offer us any insight into how consistency could be maintained, but he does mention that transmedia worlds are built partly for the purpose of longevity. Gomez offers a clear advice on assembling a franchise clearinghouse to steward the property. He mentions several large corporations that have task forces for maintaining the integrity of the vision and execution. Dowd & al. also offer a concrete suggestion in creating a transmedia bible, a comprehensive reference guide for the purpose of maintaining focus and consistency.

3.4.4 Make sense in each medium

All writers agree that understanding the special requirements of each medium is crucial. Schell goes as far as suggesting that it should be taken into consideration while designing the property. Schell also mentions that properties should be intuitively understood and they are about wish fulfillment. Since Schell's examples are all entertainment properties these can also be seen as intrinsic requirements for making sense in a chosen medium. Gomez suggests appointing a transmedia producer, who understands the special requirements of different mediums to oversee the project. Dowd & al. suggest that careful consideration is warranted while choosing the primary medium. Also resource requirements for execution in different mediums should be considered.

3.4.5 Shared universe

All writers agree that transmedia worlds are not designed to be closed worlds fearfully guarded by the parent company. Schell iterates that successful transmedia worlds have evolved over time because several creators have developed the property. He gives us examples from the public domain. Gomez considers audience participation to be paramount. He believes it should be validated and feedback channels should be constructed into the transmedia project. Dowd & al. suggest abandoning "writer" and "reader" concepts and urges to start thinking more in terms of "co-creator" and "collaborator".

3.4.6 One primary form

No clear consensus exists among writers if transmedia has or should have a primary dominant form rooted in one medium. Jeff Gomez is the only one who is currently working primarily on transmedia applications. Notably he is the only one who makes no mention of the necessity of intellectual property being rooted or that it is at its strongest in one media. Schell makes the claim that a property is rooted in one media, but grow to be larger so that the original form is no longer dominant. Dowd & al make the claim that a property has one primary form and all others are complimentary to it.

Table 1. Analysis showed that a list of factors could be derived from the source material

	Jesse Schell	Jeff Gomez	Dowd & al.
Write the world, not a story	Yes	Yes	Yes
Strong message	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maintain consistency	Not mentioned	Yes	Yes
Make sense in each medium	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shared universe	Yes	Yes	Yes
One primary form	No	Not mentioned	Yes

4 Analysis

In the analysis section I will look at two sets of transmedia properties and compare them to my short list of factors. In the first part I will compare Bionicle and Star Wars. In the second part I will compare Marvel and DC Comics.

4.1 Bionicle vs. Star Wars

Previously known for providing its customers with a building experience, LEGO was looking to offer children the possibility for roleplaying and storytelling. (Robertson 2013, 36.) Licensing business was heating up in North America and LEGO felt it had no chance, but to participate. Despite some heavy resistance within, the company decided to acquire the Star Wars license. (Robertson 2013, 39 – 42.) Star Wars had already seen success with its own toys manufactured by Kenner Products. The most popular Star Wars toys had been the action figures that enabled children to not only act out scenes from the movies, but to invent more stories that took place in the Star Wars universe. (Robertson 2012; Schell 2006, 300.) LEGO published their first Star Wars toy in 1999 as Lucasfilm released Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace. Star Wars toys were a huge hit for the company and boosted sales beyond expectations, but LEGO had to pay expensive licensing fees to Lucasfilm. (Robertson 2013, 152.) LEGO wanted to create its own intellectual property, a toy-line that came with a story, characters and merchandised property licenses. In 2001 LEGO brought out Bionicle. Star Wars and Bionicle became the companies' two biggest sellers for several years along with Harry Potter. (Robertson 2012; LEGO 2014.) The two properties in a similar market place turned out to have very different fates.

Bionicle was the collaborative effort of LEGO and Advance advertising agency, collaboration that had started earlier with the Star Wars –line. (Robertson 2013, 153.) It was a completely new kind of toy for LEGO and brought with it a new kind of business model. (Robertson 2013, 156.) For the first time LEGO published successfully an in-house developed product with a story. Alongside the toys they published movies, games and cartoons. In the same year LEGO published another licensed storyworld: Harry Potter. In the early 2000's Star Wars and Harry Potter turned profit only in the years there was a movie released. (Robertson 2012.) In 2003 and 2004 Bionicle was the only profitable toy line. In fact it became known as the toy that saved LEGO. (Roberts 2013, 154 – 155.)

In term of theme the Bionicle series was far darker and more violent than any of the previous LEGO toy lines. It had a strong sense of mythology and even temporarily some more

serious themes as the heroes armed with the forces of nature and waged war against machines trying to destroy the green paradise island of Mata Nui. The Bionicle world holds some surprising philosophical depth as well, considering it's a toy line. Quite prominently displayed in some of the stories were the three virtues of unity, duty and destiny, which were granted by the Great Spirit Mata Nui to its chosen species the Matoran. Unity taught that no one succeeds alone. Duty was about diligence and responsibility. Destiny resembled Aristotelean concept of potential. The aim was to be the best possible you. There were also nine sub-virtues, which affect every aspect of everyday life in Matoria. There exists a whole backstory to who the Matorians are and what the Matorian universe is all about. (Bionicle Wikia.)

The story of Bionicle spans over a decade with many heroes, foes and magical elements like power masks, but in the end the story can be boiled down to few sentences. Six Toas are destined to fight the powers of darkness and they save the island of Mata Nui. Later with new allies and new foes they save the city of Metru Nui. This goes on from 2001 to 2005. From 2006 the series take an even darker turn and the stories become more cosmic in nature. Even still the old battle rages on with new masks and new Toas and enemies; even if some new machinery is added on. But throughout the history of Bionicle very little has changed in the basic premise within the property. It is always the same story of Toas against Makuta, albeit with some variety, but with new merchandise and grander locations. It had become one story trapped in an arms race against itself. (Biomediaproject 2014.) Even though the story was mapped out to continue for the next twenty years it only consisted of team of eight writers, who also decided which medium would get what part of the story. (Widdicombe 2004.) But things are very different in a universe far away in terms of shared universe and creating a world, not a story.

Star Wars story is not so easy to explain. One could go through the storyline from the original movie trilogy, the prequel trilogy or the Clone Wars series, but that wouldn't even begin to cover the vast variety of storylines that is the Star Wars Expanded Universe. Expanded Universe is all parts of the Star Wars universe that explores everything outside the official movies. (Star Wars on YouTube 2014.) Surprisingly this part that is outside the canon makes up for more than half of the content that is known as Star Wars. (Taylor 2014, xvi.) Yet everything was closely supervised by Lucas himself. Continuity editors relayed messages from writers and publishers to check what was allowed and what was not. (Kline 1999, 200 – 201). Even if fans opinions vary wildly on what is true Star Wars and what isn't (Summers 2007), the Expanded Universe has increased fan engagement greatly. Lucas didn't only write a story, but created a story world and left the door ajar for

creators to fill that world with content and there is a lot of it. In fact without the Expanded Universe Star Wars would just be the classic films, TV-series and merchandising.

Bionicle world had the aforementioned eight writers working on the universe and in comparison the case of Star Wars no one has really dared to count the number of writers who have contributed to it. Star Wars: The Old Republic video game had more than sixty novels worth of dialogue written and over forty man-years of writing. (Parisi & Erickson 2011, 15.) Star Wars: The Old Republic is just one game and you have to consider that one can find nearly 200 Star Wars related video games in Wikipedia alone. (Wikipedia 2014). It is difficult to determine how many Star Wars books are out there since most of them are not part of the canon and there is no reliable list on the subject. On goodreads website a fan had created a list of 320 Star Wars novels. There are doubtless more books and the list doesn't even cover the non-fiction and encyclopedias. (Goodreads 2014.) The shared universe is a far cry from what happened with Bionicle. Bionicle lead writer Greg Farshtey corresponded with young Bionicle fans and tested ideas. In fact Farshtey explains how many of the books he wrote were in response to the emails he received from children. (Robertson 2013, 167.) For LEGO it was one of the first steps in a trend where the company engages with its customers. But even so, LEGO never really relinquished the reins of the property like Lucas did with Star Wars. Bionicle universe was still the job of few select creators.

In 2009 to the shock and horror of many fans LEGO announced it would discontinue Bionicle in 2010. In the official statement it stated that while they still believed in buildable characters they wanted a more flexible platform, wider audience and a wide variety of entry points. (The Brothers Brick 2009.) While for the most part fans were stunned by the news some were relieved. When browsing through fan reactions it is easy to see that many believed the story inside Bionicle had gone stale and all interesting plot elements had been solved. (The Brothers Brick 2009; Brickset 2009.) Eventually the fans who continued to read the stories published in the Bionicle website were rewarded with the news that LEGO is bringing Bionicle back in 2015 (Kell 2014).

Both Bionicle and Star Wars have been able to capture the imaginations of their fans. Both had become intriguing story worlds where people were willing to spend countless hours. Both properties have far more depth in terms of themes and world building than one would expect from a plastic toy-line or from a space western movie. Both properties have maintained continuity and integrity of vision over the years due to careful management. That is until Bionicle was discontinued. One clear difference in managing of the properties is that George Lucas shared his universe with his fans. By encouraging other

people to invent more stories and inviting fans to participate in countless ways, he was able to create engagement that is unparalleled in entertainment business. This allowed for the intellectual property to become larger and richer than a small team of writers could ever have imagined.

Table 2. Star Wars corresponded to the factors better than Bionicle.

	Bionicle	Star Wars
Write the world, not a story	No	Yes
Strong message	Yes	Yes
Maintain consistency	Yes	Yes
Make sense in each medium	Yes	Yes
Shared universe	No	Yes
One primary form	Yes	Yes

Bionicle and Star Wars were the two most successful LEGO themes from 2001 – 2010. Bionicle was discontinued, but Star Wars has continued to grow. Both intellectual properties have a strong message and deep storyworlds. George Lucas shared the Star Wars intellectual property with other creators and fans to gain spreadability and growth, whereas Bionicle was left on the shoulders of few writers. In the end the Bionicle story ran out of ideas.

4.2 Marvel vs. DC Comics

Superheroes have come a long way since 1938 when Superman was first published. So have the companies that bring us these stories. The rivalry between DC Comics (formerly National Comics) and Marvel Comics (formerly Timely Comics) was established early and has continued since. (Morrison 2013, 27 – 28). DC Comics had built their success on big names like Superman and Batman, Marvel Comics, while not having a superstar like Batman, had the advantage in numbers. When Disney bought Marvel Entertainment in 2009 for \$4 billion it acquired a library of 5000 characters. (Barnes 2009).

In the early days of DC Comics all the superheroes lived their own lives and had their own adventures. When the story ended everything returned back to normal only to get thrown into disarray in a next story. This was until the early 1960's when editor Julius Schwartz guided the DC universe to become a multiverse and thus allow for an infinite number of stories and series in parallel timelines. It gave the creators a possibility to merge different characters into one story and in a one world while maintaining the hero's own stories in an alternate universe. This allowed for greater continuity and manageability of storylines.

Now the writers could experiment and do drastic changes into already established histories. (Morrison 2011, 111 – 112.) Since the most important Marvel characters were developed by a small team of artists and writers during the same time they were able to create a more cohesive design. (Marvel 2014.)

The emphasis was now on developing the worlds and creating multiple storylines of the same characters. You could just place your story conveniently on Marvel Earth-2229 for example; Earth-616 being the world we live in. If you wanted a new spin on characters, all you had to do was hire a new team. When producing comics both publishing houses have editors that work to assure continuity. If a writer wanted to make changes to character's history, the editor could allow retcon (retroactive continuity). In one of Superman's re-launches the story of his homeworld Krypton was completely changed (David 2001). Change was made to allow for fresher take on the story. Superheroes keep getting make-overs all the time. Retconning the stories has become a standard practice with Marvel and DC Comics.

What also allowed for continuity was the fact that superheroes are always superheroes no matter the medium. Superman has his superpowers in comics, games and films. The logic of Superman is always the same. He can fly, he has x-ray vision, and he is the strongest man on earth. He is also the defender of the weak and the champion of justice. He is always recognizable and the rules are always in place. This goes for all the superheroes no matter what their specialty is. Superheroes have flexibility for change, but they are always logical. Superheroes by their very nature create storyworlds that seem like games with rules and much like Pokémon they are always logical no matter what the medium.

With shared universes, multiple series and retcons perhaps it is not all that surprising that superheroes found their way to TV-screens and Film. Creating a storyworld that has logical rules no matter where or how you tell the story and allowing for flexibility the Superheroes have had surprising elasticity for longevity. A storyworld that facilitates growth, strong message and logic is a powerful tool for a creator. You can make almost any kind of product and still maintain the core value of the brand. Both DC Comics and Marvel have storyworlds primed for success as transmedia. DC Comics is owned by Time-Warner and Marvel is part of the Disney group, so both have the IP's, financial muscle, deep talent pools and extraordinary reach. While the comic book sales have evened out (Armitage 2014) Marvel is winning clearly at the box office (Fischer 2013). The ripple down effect to licensing and merchandising goes clearly to Marvel as well (LicenseMag 2012).

The biggest hit at the box office for Marvel was without a doubt *The Avengers* (Outlaw 2014). It was the final movie in a plan that Marvel calls Phase One (Plumb 2013). The plan included 5 movies presenting Marvel characters: Iron Man, Hulk, Thor and Captain America. In *The Avengers* –movie the main characters and an ensemble cast of lesser heroes and villains were Marvel brought the story to a conclusion. And they were just getting started on Phase Two. Phases Two and Three will introduce us to even more characters. Judging by the success of the movie, the audience reacted enthusiastically to the Marvel storyworld that was presented as a continuous story. The movies presented a world. It offered more than just one-time vision of an adventure. The movies had continuity. With the successful movie series going Marvel still wasn't done. Agents Coulson and Carter were introduced as supporting characters in the movies and they offered Marvel a way to go even deeper into the storyworld. Agents Coulson and Carter represent SHIELD, an umbrella organization and a key narrative tool that brings men and superheroes together. Both agents got their own TV-series that were directly linked to the movies. Anything major that happened in the movies happens in the series. (Schaefer 2014.)

While Marvel goes from strength to strength on TV and film DC Comics under Warner Bros' performance has been underwhelming. Movies like *Green Lantern*, *Catwoman* and *V for Vendetta* have failed at the box office (Fischer 2013.) All the movies are stand-alone films. As well as DC's TV-series *Smallville* and *Arrow* are produced with no interconnect- edness to the movies. DC underperformers all have different producers and third party partners in charge of production. Warner Brothers doesn't have a separate division in charge of DC properties. (Gomez 2014.) The continuity suffers greatly. DC has attempted to present all its superheroes in *The Justice League* -film, but it was cancelled in mid- production. But even if it had been released there still would have been no connections to the successful *Batman* movies. In fact *Batman* director Chris Nolan made sure *The Jus- tice League* wouldn't be made, because of lack of continuity. The two batmen looked completely different and had different actors. (Newton 2014.)

President of DC Comics, Diane Nelson says in an interview that while recognizing Mar- vel's success DC is not about to copy them. She is happy with DC's success at the box office and that the company has a different strategy. (Kit 2013.) The track record indicates that the strategy leaves room for improvement. One of DC's strengths in comics has been its vast universe of characters and stories, but it hasn't been able to translate that success into film like its main competitor has.

Table 3. Marvel corresponded to the factors better than DC

	DC	Marvel
Write the world, not a story	Yes	Yes
Strong message	Yes	Yes
Maintain consistency	No	Yes
Make sense in each medium	No	Yes
Shared universe	Yes	Yes
One primary form	No	No

Both companies have exceptionally strong intellectual properties and on the strength of those properties they have grown beyond comic book publishing. Marvel has shown more flexibility and consistency in its strategy to gain spreadability and growth.

5 Conclusion

In the conclusion I repeat the factors for designing transmedia that I was able to derive from the source material. I also present how these factors compared to two sets of intellectual properties: Bionicle vs. Star Wars and Marvel vs. DC Comics.

5.1 Conclusion of results

My goal for this research was twofold:

1. What factors are prerequisites for good transmedia design?

Analysis showed that a short list of prerequisites for transmedia design could be derived from the writings of Jesse Schell, Jeff Gomez, Tim Dowd, Michael Fry, Michael Niederman and Josef Steiff. The factors are as follows:

- Write the world, not a story
- Strong message
- Maintain consistency
- Make sense in each medium
- Shared universe
- One primary form

The analysis revealed that the intellectual property should have a strong message to the fans. The message should be managed consistently. The intellectual property should be designed in a way that allowed for multiple stories and its creation should be shared with other creators and fans. There was no consensus on the primary form.

2. Does the design of intellectual property as transmedia affect its longevity and spreadability?

Analysis showed that the factors did have an impact on the longevity and spreadability of intellectual properties of Bionicle, Star Wars; the superhero properties of Marvel Comics and DC Comics.

Table 4.

	Bionicle	Star Wars
Write the world, not a story	No	Yes
Strong message	Yes	Yes
Maintain consistency	Yes	Yes
Make sense in each medium	Yes	Yes
Shared universe	No	Yes
One primary form	Yes	Yes

Opening up the intellectual property of Star Wars for other creators, while maintaining the original vision, has helped the intellectual property to grow and gain longevity. In contrast keeping the intellectual property development inside a small team robbed the Bionicle property of its chance for renewal and growth. The line was discontinued sooner than planned.

Table 5.

	DC	Marvel
Write the world, not a story	Yes	Yes
Strong message	Yes	Yes
Maintain consistency	No	Yes
Make sense in each medium	No	Yes
Shared universe	No	Yes
One primary form	No	No

While both companies have similarly strong intellectual properties DC has not been able to grant its fans access to the storyworld like Marvel has. Marvel created a unified vision for its intellectual property and saw that it was consistently delivered to its fans. The strategy rewarded Marvel with an opportunity for greater spreadability. Offering many access points to the lives and histories of Marvel superheroes has given Marvel substantial financial benefit against its competitor.

5.2 Personal evaluation

I think the results of this research are encouraging. It appears that an intellectual property for a game company, the storyworld, characters and story can be designed in a way that allows for spreadability and longevity. At the very least it shows how not to design a storyworld if you want to grow your intellectual property.

The findings have had a direct impact on the creation Johnny Graves –The Bastard Son of Satan. Originally it was the story of an ordinary man living as a small crook who one day realizes his father is none other than Satan himself. His father wants him back to Hell to take over the family business. Johnny refuses and fights his father’s minions and demons that are sent to take him back.

It made perfect sense to start developing the backstory of Johnny. There could be a whole world behind him. Why was Johnny here on earth and not in Hell with his father? How does the migration from Hell to Earth happen? Is there a Heaven and what is its relation to Hell? It soon dawned on us that creating a storyworld and not just one story was not only fun, but it offered us rules and goals. It offered us with more gameplay ideas and we learned the storyworld could be gamified as a computer game, board game and a card game. It gave us a storyworld that could facilitate many storylines around free will, redemption and salvation. If we hadn’t thought of the nature of the storyworld beforehand, creating it after Johnny’s story was published might well have turned out to be impossible. This gives us a unified vision, a chance to plan the stories and games well ahead of publication. This way we can assure that every publication will always feel like an integral part of the world.

Since Johnny Graves –The Bastard Son of Satan will not be published until 2015 it is difficult to say how Stupid Stupid games will be able to maintain the message and vision of the intellectual property. But understanding what the challenge is gives us time to prepare and helps us recognize the right questions.

It is important to remember that the factors for designing transmedia do no guarantee that the intellectual property will penetrate mainstream. The benefits will only become apparent if the intellectual property becomes a hit. Although it could be argued that a well-developed intellectual property increases its attraction and there are certain cumulative advantages for working with one IP for a long time. Also if we design the intellectual property first we are not platform dependent and that has value in the rapidly changing game industry.

6 Further development

The scope of this research presents only a rudimentary picture of intellectual property design. I believe that narrative design can be taken to a more detailed level. All of the factors can be studied with more detail and they can offer many practical solutions to building intellectual property for a game company.

Better consistency could be achieved by designing fictional game worlds as games. Storyworlds have conflict build into them for dramatic tension, but e.g. in the case of Pokémon the storyworld has many game like details that have made its transition to other mediums more logical. What are the prerequisites for designing such storyworlds? Such factors could be found by comparing the principles of game design, storytelling and world building

Henry Jenkins mentions extractability as a transmedia trait. Characters or items extracted from the intellectual property into the real world. (Jenkins 2009.) Jenkins is a media researcher and his ideas are accurate observations of culture. He doesn't offer tools for a game designer to build extractability into intellectual property. It could be very interesting and beneficial to understand how extractability could be designed.

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