

Interactive NonFiction / INF

Arnau Gifreu Castells /2013

Introduction and project overview

Project Summary

Interactive Nonfiction - INF - is an online community project to be established as a collaborative tool for the research, production and exchange of interactive nonfiction formats (essay, report, documentary and online journalism).

Research will be empowered by the creation of an observatory formed by experts in the various fields of interactive nonfiction (INFLab).

Production will be encouraged by a program where different participants will be selected to produce prototypes of interactive projects related to nonfiction (INFPro).

Diffusion will be through social media present in the web portal, an online platform that will give visibility to the whole project and will allow a high degree of participation, exchange and interaction, becoming the first social network dedicated to interactive nonfiction (Infcom).

The expected applications and benefits of the INF project are targeted at various actors and sectors of the audiovisual interactive creation and production of nonfiction, academic research and training in this field and in social networks of culture, leisure and entertainment.

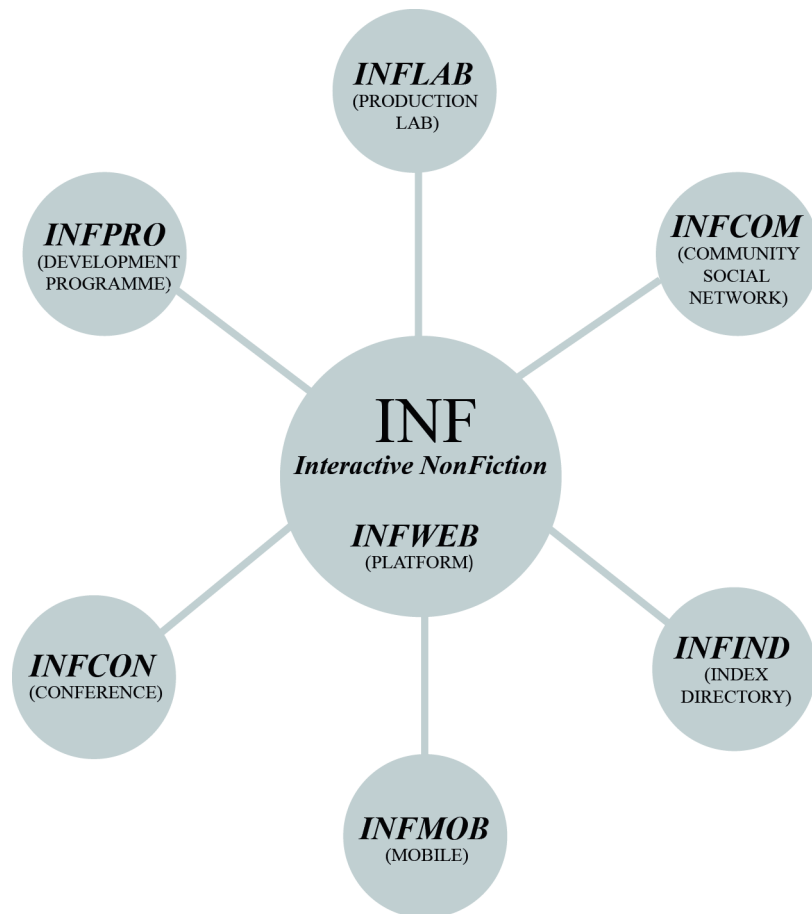


Figure 1. Diagram of the different components of the INF project

Precedents and Context

The advent of digital technologies and especially the World Wide Web has led to the emergence of new forms of creation, production, distribution and reception of audiovisual productions, and the effects are manifest in the forms of construction and consumption of audiovisual stories.

In recent years, the production of audiovisual nonfiction has been complemented and enriched by a set of multimedia applications, which have affected the logic of production and exhibition. The field of interactive nonfiction is producing border works that integrate a combination of languages and communication systems (multimodality), and, in addition, new interactive experiences where users take on a key role (interactivity). These two basic aspects contribute decisively to enriching the area of audiovisual interactive nonfiction.

In this context, the project aims to encourage a space of documentation, reflection and exchange relating to the evolution of the forms of expression and narration of contemporary audiovisual and interactive nonfiction discourses. User participation is the key element that articulates all the possibilities for interactive nonfiction genres. The reader or user (now interactor, participant and contributor) in these new formats acquires the characteristics of an author and to a certain extent becomes the creator of a personalized story, because he/she directs the navigation control (and by extension, the order of the discourse) and uses the great capacity that interaction permits (the defining characteristic that differentiates interactive digital media thanks to its interface).

Moreover, the market for mobile devices is virgin and an unexplored terrain, full of potential and excellent prospects for these specific genres. The classical space-time boundaries are blurred and we can connect and browse anywhere and at any time. Classic devices - such as a mouse or keyboard - are replaced by others which open up a new universe of possibilities more in accordance with the natural human way of proceeding and relating. As this new technology and format offers more alternatives for interaction between users and the interface, the possible ways of learning by interacting with the system will also grow exponentially. Devices such as the Apple iPad and the new version 5 of the HTML language, which accepts video and other interesting implementations, make it possible for these new formats to be viewable and navigable in third generation mobile phones.

State of the art

For a thorough understanding of the current development status of interactive nonfiction productions, we have carried out extensive research in the following six areas: (1) Related Events and Conferences (specific and general), (2) Business/Production companies and specialized practitioners/featured actors, (3) Researchers (main and related disciplines), (4) specific software, (5) Bibliography and References (specific and related) and (6) Online Resources (specific and related). We believe that this review of the state of development of this field covers the vast majority of work relating to the formats of interactive nonfiction.

The analysis of the three main areas examined - Related Events, Companies and Specific Specialized Researchers - shows that there is little significant progress today and the most important work is concentrated in the research and production from the

anglophone and francophone world, predominantly in countries such as Canada, England, France and the United States. It is precisely for this reason that we consider it to be essential to initiate a project that encourages the production of this type of projects, which will position itself in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, but that will also emphasize and enhance Latin culture (Catalonia, Spain and Latin America), and will provide a similar tool in three languages, Catalan, Spanish and English. A proposal such as INF would become a reference in the Catalan, Spanish and Latin American sector, and would also be connected to the entire potential English-speaking area.

Design and phases

INF is a multiplatform project which we will deploy according to the following stages of design and implementation:

- Preparation of the general research project (2012).
- Configuration of the structure of study and analysis (INFLab): the research observatory and the laboratory (2013).
- Visibility and dissemination (INFWeb): the web platform (2013). In parallel with setting up the structure for research, design and production phases will generate the site that aims to disseminate the research results (INFLab), acquiring visibility on the net. During the development and optimization of the web desktop versión, it is also expected that the parameters will be adjusted to make it useful for mobile technology (INFMob).
- Implementation of the production proposal (INFPro): the production program (2014). In this phase four attractive proposals will be selected, one for each format, and one will be chosen for production. The authors of the selected proposal will be advised by the experts of the observatory and provided with equipment, training and mentoring by recognized practitioners in the appropriate field. There will be a four-month preparation period and then the platform will give visibility to the selected projects. The aim is to put the emphasis on mobile devices for the first edition, with the team aiming to generate mobile applications (APPS).
- Implementation of the database (INFInd): the index/directory of projects (2014). Each of the formats of interactive nonfiction will include a list sorted alphabetically and

chronologically, with the project name, the year of production, a brief description of the project and a model of categorization in relation to a predetermined analytical model.

- Implementing an online user community (Infcom): the social network (2015). At this stage the goal is to create the first social network dedicated to promoting the interactive nonfiction formats.

- Organization of an event around interactive nonfiction (INFCon): the conference (2015). This will consist of a conference centred on the field of study, but this could adopt different formats such as a symposium, conference, festival or any other possible option.

Applications and benefits of the project

The applications and opportunities for expansion of the INF project can be deployed especially in three areas increasingly closely linked: research and innovation, teaching and training and production and distribution. As an indication only, we suggest that its availability may be useful to the following beneficiaries:

a) National, European and international research groups, which could use the platform as an observatory for acquiring documentation for visibility and dissemination (INFLab/Web)

b) University teaching and professional programs, which would have a platform for documentation and interaction for different teaching activities (INFLab/Web/Ind)

c) Specific postgraduate training offers such as an interuniversity Master's Degree where companies could take part. (Infcom/Pro)

d) Initiatives for creation and production: production of prototypes through the creation of an interactive laboratory, a production program and links with specific companies (INFPro)

e) Organization of annual or biannual events related to the development of the field of interactive nonfiction (festival, congress, symposium, etc.) (INFCon)