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Press Release

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Romance on the screen – triggered via SMS

Research project NM2 presents the world's first viewer-driven romantic comedy “Accidental Lovers” on Finnish national television

On 27 December, the world's first *ShapeShifted* romantic comedy will be broadcast as “Accidental Lovers” goes to air on Finnish national television, YLE TV1. Using original technology from European research project NM2 (New Millennium, New Media), viewers will be able to affect the unfolding drama, encouraging, or spoiling, a possible love affair between the two unlikely lovers, Roope and Juulia, using SMS text messages. On the screen, viewers will see their SMS messages and will hear the characters respond to their texts. A glowing heart will show whether their messages are warming or cooling the hearts of the romantic couple, and viewers will see the relationship develop according to their wishes. And if the romance doesn't progress as viewers wish, they can try again later: four runs of the programme will be broadcast showing ten different evolutions of the love affair; each will be different, each will react to the viewers' wishes.

As the worlds of television and the Internet converge, writers and television producers are developing new forms of interactive and personalised television. Directors and writers, such as Mika Tuomola and Leena Saarinen from “Accidental Lovers”, are exploring forms of television in which the viewer can affect the unfolding narrative. The NM2 project has set out to provide tools that support the production of such stories, including “Accidental Lovers”, and calls such productions *ShapeShiftedTV*.

ShapeShiftedTV stories are described by a story world, whereas traditional linear programmes can be described by a timeline. The story world encapsulates the different *ShapeShiftedTV* stories that can be told from the overall narrative, and NM2 describes this story world using a new computationally-supported language of narrative represented on a screen using a “narrative canvas” and simple graphical elements. It is this means of representation that has allowed “Accidental Lovers” to be realised.

Doug Williams, NM2 Project Director at BT says: “The introduction of interactive TV changed the way viewers consume television programmes. Looking to the future, production companies need to seek new and more innovative ways to personalise the programmes they create. *ShapeShiftedTV* is the ultimate in personalisation, and NM2 is the driving force making it happen.”

The requirement to create a programme whose narrative automatically responds to text messages sent by its audience has also necessitated innovative approaches to broadcast delivery which extend the capabilities of existing play-out automation systems.

NM2's unique solution for “Accidental Lovers” includes the following components:

Text Message Moderation: Text messages received from viewers are moderated and processed by the production team using a special tool which is linked to a dynamic model of the drama's narrative structure.



Realisation Engine: At the heart of the delivery system, this component holds a detailed representation of the “Accidental Lovers” ‘story world’ as defined by the production team using the NM2 tools. It continuously analyses viewers’ text messages and automatically directs the mood and pace of the narrative, choosing how the video, audio and graphics layers should be assembled, delivering these as a continuous stream of instructions to the playout system.

Playout System: NM2 uses PubliTronic Indigo⁴ playout hardware to render a broadcast-quality MPEG-2 video stream, which is delivered via a fibre-optic link to YLE’s Helsinki studios. Indigo⁴’s advanced multi-processor engine can composite up to 10 heterogeneous layers in real time. The Indigo can easily be implemented in a wide variation of environments, from a simple slave unit to a stand-alone-full-playout unit. The concept is specifically designed to be used in an automated fashion.

The NM2 tools are being developed using numerous pilot productions including eight in the current project, covering genres as diverse as News, Documentary, Advertising and Drama. These productions are looking beyond broadcast to the delivery of personalised *ShapeShiftedTV* over broadband Internet and IPTV.

About NM2

NM2 - New Millennium, New Media, is an Integrated Project under the European 6th Framework Programme in the thematic priority of Information Society Technology. The main goal of the interdisciplinary project is to create new production tools for the media industry. These tools will enable the easy production in technically standardised formats of non-linear, personalised media genres based on sound and moving images suitable for transmission over broadband networks. NM2 is running from September 2004 to August 2007.

The project has 13 partners from 8 European countries and is led by BT:

Technical

BT, UK (technical project manager); Joanneum Research, Austria; Goldsmiths College, UK; Telefónica I+D, Spain; Sony Netservices, Austria; Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Media production

Cambridge University Moving Image Studio (CUMIS), UK; Illuminations Television Limited, UK; University of Art & Design Helsinki, Finland; University of Ulster, School of Art & Design, UK; Malmö University, Arts and Communication (Sweden)

Consumer behaviour & business analysis

Netherlands Organisation For Applied Scientific Research – TNO, Netherlands

Management

Eurescom, Germany

NM2 website: <http://www.ist-nm2.org>

About “Accidental Lovers”

“Accidental Lovers” is a character-based romantic black comedy, the narrative of which is influenced by the engagement through SMS text messages from its audience. “Accidental Lovers” won the 2003 Banff Centre new Media Cyber-pitch competition. “Accidental Lovers” introduces a new interactive format and genre for television. Viewers can affect the unfolding drama, by sending mobile messages to a system that triggers on-screen events based on the keyword recognition. The system responds immediately by audio dialogue of the characters and indirectly through consequential thematic changes on the video images and scenes. Events



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will be collected from a large database of video and audio clips of improvised scenes that are associated with keywords that will be sensitive to the incoming mobile messages. Flexible content units of video, audio and text combined with algorithmically directed databases, associative and metaphorical script writing and the chance guarantee the sustainability in the story line.

“Accidental Lovers” will be broadcast on Finnish national television, YLE TV1, on the following dates:

Wednesday, 27th December 2006, 22:45 - 23:30

Friday, 29th December 2006, 23:00 - 24:00

Wednesday, 3rd January 2007, 23:00 - 24:00

Friday, 5th January 2007, 23:00 - 24:00

“Accidental Lovers” is produced by Media Lab’s and Media Centre Lume’s joint research group, Crucible Studio, in the University of Art and Design Helsinki.

Crucible Studio website: <http://crucible.lume.fi>

University of Art and Design Helsinki website: <http://www.uiah.fi>

YLE TV1 website: <http://www.yle.fi/tv1>

About ShapeShiftedTV

ShapeShiftedTV is a term first coined by John Wyver of media producer Illuminations to describe stories whose narratives can be affected by choices made by the viewer. Illuminations is a partner in the NM2 project.

Illuminations website: <http://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk>

About PubliTronic

Established in the Netherlands in 1997, PubliTronic has always taken pride in creating original concepts and innovative technology for broadcast automation. PubliTronic specializes in broadcasting flexibility, with a vision to invest in innovative technology for many different broadcast applications and an ambition to create no-nonsense and cost-efficient solutions. PubliTronic’s systems are currently being used by some of the biggest names in broadcasting – including the BBC, MTV, RTL, NOB and many more.

PubliTronic website: <http://www.publitrionic.nl>

Press contact

Milon Gupta, Marketing and PR Manager, Eurescom; tel: +49 6221 989-121; e-mail: gupta@eurescom.eu

Suzy Christopher, Senior PR Manager, BT; tel: +44 207 356 5365; e-mail: suzanne.christopher@bt.com

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