



# NM2 Newsletter January 2007



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## ***Accidental Lovers* broadcast by Finnish TV**



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*The world's first ShapeShifted TV production, **Accidental Lovers** (Sydän kierroksella), was broadcast on Finnish TV in December and January.*

Accidental Lovers is one of the eight NM2 prototype productions developed within NM2. It was broadcast by YLE 1 on 27<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> December and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> January. The production is a character-based romantic black comedy, whose narrative can be affected via text messages sent by the audience. In 2003, Accidental Lovers won the Banff Centre New Media Cyber-Pitch competition. Over the Christmas

period Accidental Lovers won the hearts of the Finnish people, reaching audiences of about 70,000 at each broadcast.

In the production viewers can affect the unfolding drama by sending in text messages which are 'read' by the NM2 system using keyword recognition. The NM2 system then chooses a voice over that appears to comment upon, answer or react to the same theme represented by the text message shown on the TV screen. The NM2 system also logs how, overall, the texts want the love affair to develop. This is represented on screen using a heart which will turn from blue to red as they fall in love. The aggregated effect of the text messages is to "drive" the video to represent an evolution of the relationship that may be either happy or sad. Twelve cycles of the programme were broadcast allowing viewers to explore many different ways the love affair of the familiar couple could evolve. Whilst feedback from the audience is still being collated early viewing figures suggest that the programmes were more popular than normal dramas broadcast at this time in the



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schedule. The broadcasts went really well, no technical problems occurred, and the viewers sent in many good SMS messages. The production has now been invited for the Emmy awards competition.

*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>

## **Interactive Village available on NM2 Web**

A comprehensive demo of the NM2 production *Interactive Village* is now available on the NM2 Web for interested viewers. It can be viewed at [www.ist-nm2.org/media productions.html](http://www.ist-nm2.org/media productions.html)

*Interactive Village* is based on village life in Dolní Roveň in the Czech Republic. Through a web interface, the NM2 system builds different documentaries based around specific places within the village. These can be selected on the map at the bottom of the screen, or based upon topics represented by selectable thumbnail images in the square array in the upper portion.

Thus the users can select content based on topics such as the social life in the village, or location-based items.



## **Focus on usability for the next release of the NM2 Tools**

The NM2 Tools and the NM2 middleware remain the cornerstone of the project's outputs and a common component in the workflow of all the active productions. They are being developed through close collaboration with the NM2 producers, and continue to be refined in order to support the innovative narrative forms the productions want to represent.

Having gained a good understanding of the tools' core functionality after many iterative refinements and two major software releases, in September 2006 the development team turned their attention to usability. It is clear that the timely completion of the remaining NM2 productions, and even more importantly the success of the tools in the public domain, demands that a creative professional must be able to learn to use them quickly and efficiently.



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Over the past few months, the NM2 team has consulted extensively with the NM2 producers to develop usage scenarios and get feedback on prototype user interface representations, adopting Usability Engineering and Interaction Design best practice wherever possible. A significantly new design has now been created and agreed for the next software release, and code development is well under way.

The studies carried out by our usability experts have not only led to software improvements: their findings have been combined with NM2 producers' domain experience in a new paper on production workflows which we hope to publish in the near future.

## NM2 at IBC 2006 and IST 2006

NM2 successfully demonstrated its results at IBC on 7-12 September 2006 in Amsterdam (<http://www.ibc.org>), and at the IST event on 21-23 November 2006 in Helsinki ([http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/istevent/2006/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/istevent/2006/index_en.htm)).

IBC is one of the largest events for everyone involved in the creation, management and delivery of content for the entertainment industry. About 45,000 attendees from more than 120 countries participated in the exhibition and conference. NM2 contributed with a conference paper and a stand on the exhibition floor.



IST 2006 - Strategies for Leadership – is the most important European event in the field of Information Society Technologies. This year it coincided with the launch of the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development). NM2 presented the latest version of their tools, and their Finnish production *Accidental Lovers* on a stand in the IST exhibition area.

At both events NM2 created substantial interest amongst visitors. Visitors were very interested in the new media form becoming possible with the NM2 tools. "The new media genre will allow stories to be adapted, on the fly, for an individual viewer. We think this will be immensely attractive for viewers and for advertisers" explained Dr. Doug Williams from BT, NM2's technical project manager. Dr. Williams calls this new media form "ShapeShifted TV" to stress that the user decides interactively what he or she wants to see, and how the related clip, delivered through an individual broadband channel, looks like.



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## NM2 in the public eye

NM2 has been present at various events to present its results. Below is a short summary of selected presentations:

- Stavros Alifragkis and François Penz from Cambridge University Moving Image Studios presented the NM2 production *Cambridge City Symphony* at "Happiness, Lessons from the Arts" in London, 22-23 November 2006
- NM2 partner BT presented a NM2 Conference Poster at CVMP "Conference on Visual Media Production" in London, 30 October 2006
- Michael Hausenblas from Joanneum Research provided a demo of the NM2 tools at stand at SAMT2006 (Semantics And digital Media Technology, former EWIMT) in Athens, 6-8 December 2006
- NM2 partner University of Ulster, School of Art & Design, presented the NM2 production *Interactive Village* with an accompanying poster session at the International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, 12-15 January 2007

## A new NM2 press release is available

In the context of the public broadcast of *Accidental Lovers* in Finland (see first article above), NM2 issued its second press release on 13 December 2006.

*"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 2006, the world's first ShapeShifted romantic comedy was broadcast as "Accidental Lovers" went to air on Finnish national television, YLE TV1. Using original technology from European research project NM2 (New Millennium, New Media), viewers were 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 saw their SMS messages and heard the characters respond to their texts. A glowing heart showed whether their messages are warming or cooling the hearts of the romantic couple, and viewers saw the relationship develop according to their wishes. And if the romance didn't progress as viewers wished, they can try again later: four runs of the programme were broadcast showing ten different evolutions of the love affair; each was different, each reacted to the viewers' wishes..."*

The full text of the press release is available on the NM2 News-Website:

[http://www.ist-nm2.org/pressreleases/NM2\\_PR002\\_2006\\_12\\_13.html](http://www.ist-nm2.org/pressreleases/NM2_PR002_2006_12_13.html)



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## About NM2

NM2 is an Integrated Project of the European Union's 6th Framework Programme Thematic Priority 2 (Information Society Technologies). It was submitted to the second call of the programme and addresses the strategic objective "Cross-media content for leisure and entertainment". The project is co-funded by the European Union through the IST programme under FP6.

NM2 is running from September 2004 to August 2007 and has an overall budget of about 7.5 million euro. 13 partners from 8 European countries are involved in the project.

NM2 unites leading creative and technology experts from across Europe to address a great opportunity for businesses and consumers in the near future: how to develop compelling new media genres, which take advantage of the unique characteristics of broadband networks. The project will create new production tools for the media industry that will allow the easy production of non-linear broadband media genres which can be personalised to suit the preferences of the individual user. Viewers will be able to interact directly with the medium and influence what they see and hear according to their personal tastes and wishes.

Further information is available at: <http://www.ist-nm2.org/>

**The next and final NM2 Newsletter is scheduled for July 2007**