

Case Study

Aspect

Blue Shoes Productions

Building a better society through film

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Venture

Blue Shoes Productions



Social science discipline

History



Aspect Member

The University of
Manchester



Sector

Creative Industries



Route-to-market

Start-up

Blue Shoes Productions is a start-up production company helping to document the voices of individuals and communities who remain underrepresented by the mass media.

Telling the stories of people through the powerful medium of film/ television is a key opportunity to connect with viewers and enable them to learn more about the society in which they live. However, not all viewers see themselves reflected in mainstream media. Traditionally we only see the stories of certain demographics of society, leaving many voices, cultures and backgrounds unheard.



Building a better society through film

Blue Shoes Productions is a socially responsible production company based in Manchester, which specialises in documentary filmmaking and promotional video productions. The start-up creates innovative video content for organisations that are implementing social and cultural change. Using documentary filmmaking, Blue Shoes Productions seeks to tell the unique and hidden histories of artistic wealth that exists in the North of England region. Ultimately, they are working to build a platform to raise the underrepresented stories, voices, and cultures.

Using documentary filmmaking to challenge the mainstream

stereotypes, their films highlight important societal issues such as migration and refugee experiences. The co-founders, Jake Gill, Liam Steers and Alexander Deniston, met as History Masters students at the University of Manchester (UoM) where they each took a three-month documentary filmmaking module. Ultimately they seek to use the medium of film to highlight core societal issues and to build a platform to raise underrepresented voices in society.

The right to fair representation is the core social mission of Blue Shoes Productions. As a company, they are committed to working towards achieving the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals of reducing inequalities, eliminating poverty and building a more sustainable planet. Social responsibility is a key aspect of the start-up and they ensure that their films and client projects individually feed into achieving one of the 17 UN SDGs. Recently, they have been working on projects that reduce poverty (goal 1), provide quality education (goal 4), and reduce inequalities (goal 10). They are especially passionate about locating and circulating the untold stories of those who are traditionally underrepresented and raise awareness of the inequalities and injustices in our world in order to foster real change.

The Impact

- Blue Shoes Productions has presented its first documentary A Bit of This And a Bit of That which quickly received over 60,000 views online, was screened at multiple film festivals, and was part of the 'Best of the Fest' screenings at the Sunderland Shorts: Film Festival
- The start-up secured £12,000 funding by winning the UoM Creative Award of Venture Further 2020.
- Their upcoming second documentary is Congo's Activist in Exile. The film's protagonist Jenny Dakosta Van Mputu (refugee and human rights activist) has been able to use the documentary as evidence in a personal court case – testament to the company's effort to depict 'reality' as fairly as possible from the perspective of the person experiencing it. The film helped Jenny to win his case and he now has leave to remain in the UK.



The film has made me visible and has brought a great positive impact on my life and on my modest person. I hope that my story can open the way to the debate which will lead to a change in the way some people look at immigrants and refugees, and that this changes the image and opinion that certain parts of the population have of us in British society.



Jenny Dakosta Van Mputu, Refugee and Human Rights Activist



Photo of Jenny Dakosta Van Mputu taken from 'Congo's Activist in Exile', a Blue Shoes Production documentary

The Start-up Journey: Key Learnings

The co-founders believe that the support from UoM has been paramount to the progress of the business and the success it has had thus far. Since early 2020, the Masood Enterprise Centre at UoM has enabled them to develop their business and accountancy skills via the provision of workshops, and they've held regular meetings with the team at the Centre, to guide the founders on their business journey, helping to map out goals for the business' future. They have also gained access to the Business Growth Hub and TiE North through the Enterprise Centre to connect with industry experts and receive valuable advice.

The co-founders were introduced to their long-standing mentor Sophie Everest during their studies, who is both a UoM lecturer and production company owner. From being lent equipment to being offered industry work experience, they credit the importance of the mentorship they have received from Sophie and the University. This support has continued since their graduation in December 2018 as they remain in close contact with various alumni channels at the university. They also receive regular advice and guidance from the Business School and have received opportunities for potential filming subjects, relevant to the start-up's mission, from the university's history and culture departments.

Some key advice:

- **Make and maintain connections at university:** this has provided invaluable information, industry contacts and business development guidance
- **Success is a natural consequence of hard work and perseverance:** following your passion may mean working multiple jobs in the early years to establish a name for yourself
- **Network as much as possible:** making connections and colleagues in the industry is vital in order to receive the right guidance and find new opportunities to grow as a professional



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What's next for Blue Shoes Productions?



Blue Shoes Productions remains a collaborative and democratic company: this means no dedicated producers, editors, directors as these roles are shared within the team. Looking forward, the co-founders aim to continuously develop their trade, enabling the company clientele to expand nationwide from its North West of England hub.

The long-term goal is to focus fully on original documentary filmmaking. The company's commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continues to influence their work, with the SDGs providing a clear map of crucial areas for societal

improvement. Already involved in representing issues of immigration and asylum, the company hopes to cover issues concerning SDG goals nine and thirteen as they look to cover sustainable cities and climate change in their future work.

The founders are currently developing their business development and pitch skills, with their sights set on working with media giants such as the BBC, to broadcast their documentaries to a wider audience.

Background Information

Jake Gill, Co-founder and Creative Director



Role

Since Blue Shoes Productions was founded in 2019, Jake has been gaining experience in the television industry and the heritage and cultural sector and is part of the Emerging Leaders Network with Media Trust. He is passionate about using the medium of filmmaking to build an inclusive society and a better world for everyone.



Degree

MA History, University of Manchester, 2018



Contact

jake@blueshoesproductions.com

Background Information



Liam Steers, Co-founder and Creative Director



Role

Since finishing his masters and co-founding Blue Shoes Productions, Liam has gained experience in the video production industry, and also works as the Digital Content Partner at the Royal Exchange Theatre.



Degree

MA History, University of Manchester, 2018



Contact

liam@blushoesproductions.com

Background Information



Alexander Deniston, Co-founder and Creative Director



Role

Since graduating and co-founding Blue Shoes Productions, Alex has been gaining experience in the television industry and will start working with SharpFutures in the near future.



Degree

MA History, University of Manchester, 2018



Contact

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Aspect

Transforming Society Through Social Science Innovation

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

Supported by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund, Aspect members sit at the epicentre of discovery, imagination and progress in the social sciences. We draw together pioneering academics with innovative industry leaders to tackle the most complex societal challenges of our time.



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