

■ Knowing the technical background

There is some debate about the amount of technical background and other kinds of detail that a manager needs to understand in order to manage the production of assets – and by assets we mean the content of a website or CD such as text, graphics, photographs, sound and video – and websites themselves. In conventional media areas, managers often come up ‘through the ranks’ and have done the job of the people they manage. In web design and multimedia this is less likely to happen simply because of the newness of this area and its multidisciplinary nature. A project manager might have worked as a television producer, a journalist, a trainer, a graphics artist or a computer programmer rather than as all of these; or the management of new media projects might be your first job on leaving school or university. So a detailed knowledge of one area under your control could be counter-balanced by complete ignorance of another. Multimedia production not only integrates these disciplines, it also has to balance them.

When you manage the production of assets, and of the web pages or computer software that make use of these assets, you could be working with people in the core team for your whole project, or you could be hiring in people or facilities for only a relatively small part of it. Your responsibility includes fitting their work into the whole project. This extended team will be less aware of your overall plan, and may be less involved and committed. In some cases, such as if you were to hire a photographer for a single day’s shoot or book a sound studio for a few hours to do a voice recording, they may have very little knowledge of interactive media and its special requirements and idiosyncrasies. Because multimedia involves slightly different technologies from mainstream media there will be occasions when normal practices will not be exactly right, and a knowledge – or access to knowledge – of both will make it easier for you to explain your requirements and concerns.

If you, as project manager, know something of the processes involved in creating and manipulating the assets for your project, you are in a much better position to help the asset creator achieve the result you want. In some cases you might need to be able to unravel technical jargon to do this, and you will often find that the level of respect that specialists have for you, and their willingness to go that extra mile for you, is influenced by how well you communicate with them and how well they think you understand their

point of view. Sometimes you will need simply to point people in the right direction, but in other cases you may need to direct them specifically to do what you want. It will depend on their abilities, how well you share ideas and how flexible your vision of the result can be. Experience will make this easier, but background knowledge will help you on your way.

In the course of the technically-oriented chapters of this volume of *Managing Multimedia* you will be introduced to some of the basic principles and terminologies so that you will be better equipped to achieve what you want. Although it is impossible to cover everything, the aim of these chapters includes pointers to those vital differences inherent in interactive media and, in some cases, to where assets for online projects differ from those for offline ones and where assets for display on a computer screen differ from those for a television. However, the production of assets for use on a website, interactive television or on a CD-ROM is very similar for all methods of distribution: it is at the final stages of preparation that the differences will become important.

This volume of *Managing Multimedia* also includes chapters outlining the way that the Internet, interactive television and mobile systems function. Even though, at the time of writing, there is often more talk about the opportunities convergent communications will offer than real examples, we will start with an overview of convergence.