

Connect and create the new possible

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“When I was a kid, there was no collaboration; it's you with a camera bossing your friends around. But as an adult, filmmaking is all about appreciating the talents of the people you surround yourself with and knowing you could never have made any of these films by yourself.” – Steven Spielberg

The world is changing. Convergence is here, and not just for how we interact with creative, digital and technology. The idea is that you can interact with content across any device, anywhere.

Convergence is also growing across the creation and production of all kinds of content, applications and devices, and across what they can be used for. So it's not just for entertainment, it's also for all kinds of sectors, from industry to social care.

It's time to celebrate convergence, embrace the opportunities and reap the benefits.

Convergence goes hand in hand with collaboration. There's lots of talk about collaboration within organizations. Skillsets are becoming more and more specialist, so there's plenty of scope for internal collaboration in bigger companies. But what about smaller companies? They only have so many people, and those people may already be multitasking to the max.

Collaboration can be a huge help and an opportunity to expand what is on offer, respond to different project specifications and share resources. It can also be a great way to access investment and funding, and, by the way, grants such as economic development support, at a higher rate than for companies applying alone.

Collaboration means people, including independent businesses and freelancers, coming together to contribute and share their expertise and resources to achieve a shared mission, objective, project or business outcome. They may not be in the same building, town or even country.

In the world of work, COVID-19 has demonstrated that there is huge scope for remote working and collaboration between people based around the globe. This doesn't mean never getting together physically ever again. It does mean work is possible regardless of location and can also respond to different personal circumstances and preferences.

Then there's the 'B' word – let's whisper it – Brexit. Whichever side of that debate you are on, there are still good business and cultural reasons to want to engage with markets within the EU and within the UK. As Brexit will have an impact on free movement and other business activities, collaboration offers a mutual access route. It keeps the bridges open.

Create Converge

The transnational EU project Create Converge is about using creative, digital and tech solutions to show, tell and sell. It's about using the right mix of screen, animation, games, immersive, VFX, data, analytics, robotics and more for applications beyond entertainment, like service delivery, training and marketing, and to inform R&D. It's also about giving a helping hand to collaboration.

First let's consider the use of all that cool stuff in the world of 'non-entertainment'. Dull, we may hear you cry. Really bad work everywhere, you may say. But it doesn't have to be that way. You may be seeing great work in a different field – if you're an animation aficionado, for example, you may have seen brilliant work done in VR, or vice versa.

On the client side, you may be thinking there must be great ways to help people learn new skills or try out your products and services digitally or virtually. Larger companies generally have their own in-house expertise on marketing, product and service development, and training. But if you are at a smaller company, this know-how depends on your particular interests, knowledge or networks. It could also be that you may not know where to start.

There are absolutely opportunities to create and produce innovative and inspiring work, ease the pain of getting into tech outside your current comfort zone, tell stories, work on truly fascinating subjects, or turn them into fascinating products and services.

Create Converge is helping creative, digital and tech companies collaborate and also connect with new markets beyond entertainment. There are all kinds of sectors that need applications that are not just the same old business-as-usual – sectors from fashion to construction, automotive to energy, healthcare to tourism.

Already at the forefront of these opportunities are companies like the new breed of digital agency that are showing clients how combining tech can boost their profile and sales. Services for hire also work with different clients and sectors but may specialize in only one or two areas of tech.

There are also companies totally focused from the get-go on developing new content, new intellectual property and new experiences. Commercial success is the goal, and then, hopefully, a slate of successful projects. We totally get and support that. At the same time, for many, the challenge of staying in business without regular cashflow coming can be in the way, as can the regular mission of raising investment or other funding. It might be time to open up a few more options so you can stay in the game.

Collaboration benefits

Collaboration can be empowering and can work between companies of different sizes and, of course, from different industries or sectors. It's a great way to innovate, grow, compete and diversify but at lower risk than doing it all alone.

The benefits cross finance, people, resources and knowledge.

On the financial front, it's a chance to share networks and increase sales or cut costs. Collaboration brings different people and cultures together to learn from each other and use their combined skills to do projects that neither company alone could deliver. Companies may have space and equipment they can share.

Collaboration and sharing networks also boosts competitiveness, locally, nationally and even globally. A lack of scale and just sheer number of people, or having a presence in a particular place or region, can hold businesses back from working on better opportunities.

Getting into bed with the competition? When we have asked the question about the single biggest challenge to collaboration there's always one top answer:

TRUST

Such a big word. It can't be engineered or produced by magic. Like any relationship, it takes time and communication, not to mention a bit of chemistry.

What it does *not* mean is giving up all your know-how. Collaboration can be worked on in stages, a bit like taking careful steps up a ladder or even a mountain. But just think of the view from the top.

Embracing convergence and collaboration means you can:

- Break out of silos and nurture all your talents
- Work with complementary skills to increase your offer and get a handle on skills new to you
- Increase your capacity and get higher value and more interesting contracts
- Get access to resources and facilities through sharing
- Cross-promote to collaborator networks
- Grow your own networks
- Generate regular cashflow or more cashflow
- Build diverse portfolios
- Access funding targeted at collaborators.

Collaboration can start simply, with activities around mutually helpful communication like cross-referring business, newsletter features, cross-blogging, cross-promoting through social media and making introductions.

Once trust is established, businesses might want to consider sharing information, but only to a level at which they feel comfortable and does not risk what they value. A next stage might be doing people exchanges and sharing technology.

It could all lead to jointly bidding for business, tenders or funding.

Keep in mind, as well, all the organisations with collaboration in their DNA, like regional, national and EU support programmes for business, innovation and sectors including creative, digital and technology, the Enterprise Europe Network, Horizon 2020 (to become Horizon Europe), and other EU programmes and local and transnational collaboration hubs and networks.

Think of all the tools and apps out there to help with collaboration and communication.

The Create Converge team is here to help you find what you need and make connections with collaborators and opportunities. We are nine partners in five countries – Denmark, Germany, the

Netherlands, Sweden and the UK – and we are supported by the European Union's North Sea Region.

You can start by joining the Create Converge Community via the website, where you can create your profile and post jobs, projects and opportunities – all free.