

Learning Theme: *Mobile*

As the Guardian's Group Product Manager for mobile, **Tom Grinsted** is well-placed to offer an insight into this fourth key theme for the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts.

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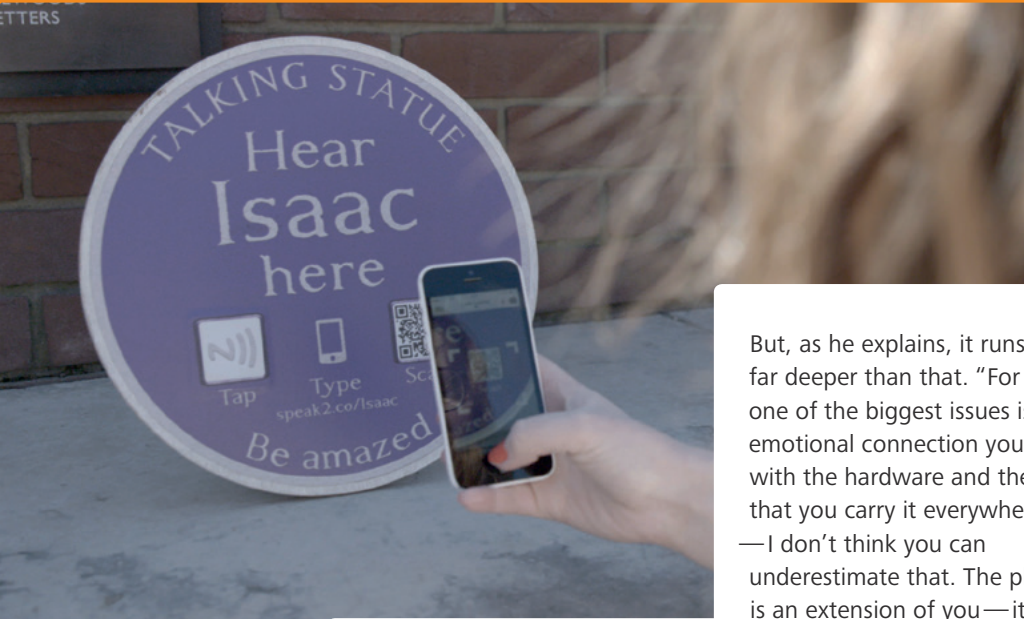
There are now more mobile devices on the planet than there are people. Both high-growth startups and established companies in emerging and developing economies are bypassing desktop computing and prioritising phones and tablets as the primary ways in which digital products and services are experienced. The launch of the Apple Watch and the rise of wearable technology are only accelerating this trend. We live in a mobile-first world.

The take-up and growth of mobile technology has led to an always-on, always-available society where content, services and information has never been more abundant or readily accessible. In a world where attention is a scarce resource, what can we do to engage audiences, grow our businesses and pursue our mission? As for all industries and contexts, our mobile-first world represents challenges and opportunities to the cultural sector. It is therefore no surprise that mobile is the fourth learning theme from the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts.

1. Tom Grinsted.

2. Sing London's *Talking Statues* used mobile devices to bring statues to life in London and Manchester.





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"Mobile is not optional any more for content providers. If you're not on mobile very soon, you probably won't exist to a large number of people." You might expect Tom Grinsted to be evangelical about the power of mobile given his role: "I'm Group Product Manager for mobile devices at the Guardian," he explains, "so my job is to oversee our entire portfolio of products that run on mobile devices. That covers all of the main Guardian apps across ios, Android, Windows and Blackberry, as well as our tablet work and also a large number of syndicated innovation projects as well."

His Guardian position certainly informs his passion for mobile, something borne out by recent analysis from the organisation. "Last year we crossed over into mobile majority," Grinsted explains, "so the majority of our content is now viewed on mobiles. It's become predominant in consumption terms, and not just at the Guardian."

But, as he explains, it runs far deeper than that. "For me, one of the biggest issues is the emotional connection you have with the hardware and the fact that you carry it everywhere—I don't think you can underestimate that. The phone is an extension of you—it's about how often you're touching it, what you use it for, and the fact that it becomes habitual. You can see it in the way that people treat them. I know a lot of people who are very happy to lend their tablets to a friend, or to their kids to play on—but they'd never give their phones to another person."

Grinsted began his career in science communication—as an education officer and facilitator in At-Bristol, the south west's science and discovery centre—before a stint as interactive design manager at the Guardian's Digital Agency, where he worked with clients including Directgov, the 2012 Olympics' education department and Kew Gardens. He then joined Imperial War Museums as multimedia manager: "I was in charge of all the in-gallery and mobile technology across all five of iwm's museums, and we did some really cool stuff like two six-man multi-touch tables on the bridge of HMS Belfast, which controlled all the lights and sounds of an entire narrative there."

But his work in the cultural and heritage sector has also given him a rare insight into visitors' relationships with content, be it in the form of museum exhibits or newspaper articles. "You used to be able to tell yourself stories about visitors who would come into a museum or gallery, read the labels and really deeply interact with your objects. That does still happen, but not everyone will do that."

"Digital proves how wrong our rosy picture of how we consume content really was—and if you put on top of that the fact that consumers have very public outlets to take content and do whatever they like with it, that fundamentally changes the relationship you thought you had with people."

Grinsted's job provides a privileged view of mobile's commercial and cultural impact.

"I work a lot with our partners, such as Apple or Google, so I see where the market is going and how mobile has changed from the big players' point of view. But also from a content and consumption point of view, and how that can be applied to the heritage industry."

Crucial to this, he believes, is recognising how mobile has changed the way we consume information. There is no going back. "At the Guardian, the relationship we used to have with people was a short, linear experience, and we now have something where literally hundreds of millions of people are reading, consuming, republishing, quoting and snapshotting our content. That's a huge shift." ▀