Engaging the Younger Audience Through Technology

Presenter: Prof. Simon Gibson, CBE, DL

RootsTech London 2019
The creation of life stories and memories can bridge intergenerational gaps. Engaging and motivating younger generations through the use of new technologies will make the creation of personal histories more engaging and attractive. Young people familiar with the concept of capturing the moment are well aligned to engage in this activity. The democratisation of history will enable future generations to learn from the experiences of all age groups, not just societies. Passing on information while you’re still alive is key to maintaining historical truth and to ensure personal history is not left behind. Family History has naturally focussed on past generations, the emergence of artificial intelligence, data science and machine learning has transformed those efforts, but the transition of the biographies and archives of the living to those family history platforms has yet to be fully realised. In many cases, upon passing, people’s data is lost forever, without provision being made for its preservation. You only die when you leave no memories.

Lesson Objective:

To assess how new technologies and engagement methods can encourage a younger audience into family history and record their own meaningful life experiences beyond traditional social media interactions.
Family History – A Personal Journey

Wind back to 1975

Not a great start, a house of pain – An analogue world, measured in shelf miles, microfilm cans and optical readers.

Recollections from those days: Expensive, lengthy, inconvenient, time consuming and frustrating. A crowded rugby style ruck and a maul for the Index books. Ordering certificates with very limited information, often made mistakes and those mistakes were costly and frustrating. This was a miserable process. An activity only for the most committed genealogy devotee.

The whole activity should have been rated R. At the time, I thought the whole process capable of damaging a young mind!

Five years later, I learnt to programme.

Since then, what has changed?
Pretty much everything!
Where have we been?

**Computing:** Constant evolution of digital platforms, programming languages, data processing, operating systems, storage, power technologies and displays.

**Communications:** The advent of the internet – the Web – photonics and digital transmission, cloud computing technologies and ubiquitous mobile multi-media communications.

**Media consumption trends.** An increase in video, democratisation of content. The desertion of linear broadcast TV, the transition to mobile consumption.

Where are we heading?

- Artificial Intelligence
- UHD Image and video capture features
- Big Data Analytics
- Machine/Deep Learning
- IoT
- Virtualisation
- Cloud Computing
- Ubiquitous high-speed mobile internet (5G)
- Tactile internet
- Augmented reality scenarios: People to places, multi-generational family reunions.
- Bioinformatics and Genetics – ‘the other code, ATCG’

Resulting in:

- Automation of matching and linking
- Ability to link content to locations
- Connecting environments to systems - IoT
- Augmented reality – a virtual resurrection of ancestors
- Ageing the environment - a virtual time machine
- Real-time time linking of the living to their ancestors
- Capture the life experience/enhance the life experience

Typical ‘state of the art’ mobile phone capabilities:

- 2-4 cameras up to 40MB
- Low light features
- Time of flight capabilities
- Zoom in microphone
- Super steady
- 4K UHD
- Ultrawide camera
- Local tone mapping
- Dual aperture
- GPS
- 5G Capable

A decade ago, these capabilities did not exist or were only available to professionals with substantial budgets.

These devices are now ubiquitous and in the hands of billions of people. Typically, they are best utilised by younger users. By encouraging and empowering young people to use these platforms for the capture of family history of the living, a priceless bridge can be established between families of the present and past generations.
Young People – The Best Equipped Interviewers

Young people are familiar with ‘capturing the moment’, through participation on social media platforms.

Consider the difference between:

Photo albums pre-2008
Photo albums of post 2008 - The ‘Selfie’ phenomenon, A digital pool of Narcissus

Capturing Family histories create a compelling reason to turn the often-inane habit of social media to a virtue.

The Challenge
Encourage younger generations to turn the lens and microphone on relatives and capture their memories and life stories

AIDA: The steps to engagement:
• Awareness – Attract the attention of the person
• Interest – raise interest by focusing on and demonstrating advantages and benefits
• Desire – convince that they want and desire the service and that it will satisfy their needs
• Action – lead person toward taking action

Family History provides a counter concept to the Ephemeral concept of social media

Having young family members preserving memories helps in the following way:

• To carry on family traditions
• To get a sense of belonging
• To understand who they came from and to incorporate that into their own lives
• To establish a core identity
• To teach our families of the good and the bad times survived to give inspiration, courage, admiration and empathy to be a stronger person in their life
• To feel proud of their heritage
• To trigger nostalgia from their relatives childhood memories
• To give our families something to relate to for comfort and belonging
• To inspire and remind family of our skills and talents. Talents in which they may have a natural skill
• Children who know about their ancestors show higher levels of emotional well-being
Dr Franklin has interviewed more than 500 centenarians across the USA and compiled their authentic and insightful wisdom. The project distils the wisdom and wit of 500 centenarians into six sections covering the passage of time, career, money, time management, secrets of longevity, and capturing and sharing wisdom.

His methodology centred on video interviews, using a template of 102 questions. Although not all questions were used, they are designed to give structure to the discussions.

Case Study: 100 Wisdom – Dr Steve Franklin (www.100wisdom.com)

Family Heritage
1. Where were you born?
2. What is your date of birth?
3. What do you know about your family’s genealogy?
4. What is your family’s ethnic background?
5. What language(s) were spoken in your home?
6. Do you have any interesting or famous relatives in your family tree?
7. When did your first family member come to this Country? Where did they settle?
8. What do you remember about your grandparents? How did they meet?
9. Where were your parents born? What was their courtship like?
10. What did your grandparents and parents do for a living?
11. Share a funny story or special memory about your grandparents or parents.
12. Describe your mother’s best qualities.
13. Describe your father’s best qualities.
14. Did you have any brothers and sisters? Names? Birth order? Age spread?

Childhood Years
15. How long did your siblings live or how old are they now?
16. What is your earliest childhood memory?
17. What was your best friend’s name?
18. Tell me about your siblings. Who were you closest to?
19. What did you do for fun in each season of the year?
20. What kinds of toys did you play with?
21. What kinds of activities did you participate in?
22. What sports did you play?
23. Describe your first school. Favourite subject? Favourite teacher?
24. How did your family celebrate birthdays and holidays?
25. What was your favourite holiday?
26. Did you have any pets or raise farm animals?
27. What’s your funniest pet story?
28. Where was your favourite place to visit as a child?
29. What was your most memorable vacation?
30. Where did your family go to get food and clothing?
31. How did you travel from place to place?
32. What was your first chore or job? Do you remember how much you got paid?
33. Who first taught you about work, money, and life? What were the core lessons?
34. How would you describe yourself as a child?
35. Tell me about the first time you saw a train, plane, or automobile? Were you a passenger?
36. What event, personal or historical, left the greatest impression on you as a child?
37. What role did God play in your family’s life when you were growing up? Did you attend church or synagogue?

Adulthood Years
38. Did you have children? Tell me about each one.
39. Did you or your spouse serve in the military? In WWII? What branch of service?
40. What level of education have you completed? Where?
41. At what age did you first start working to earn a living?
42. What was your occupation? Spouse’s occupation?
43. What was the average number of hours you worked per week?
44. Did you enjoy your work? Did you view work as a burden or a blessing? Why?
45. What do you remember about the “Roaring 1920s”?
46. What do you remember about the Great Depression? How did it affect you, change your world view?
47. When did you buy your first car? Home? Describe them. How did you pay for them?
48. What do you do with your money? Percentage saved? Invested? Donated to charity?
49. If you were given a million dollars today, what would you do with it?
50. Who most influenced your values, career path, and life choices?

Family Heritage
51. Who most influenced your values, career path, and life choices?
52. If you were given a million dollars today, what would you do with it?
53. What event, personal or historical, left the greatest impression on you as an adult?
54. What role did God play in your life during your working/parenting years?
55. What age were you when you retired?

Golden Years
56. If you could live life over again, would you pursue a different type of work?
57. What was your greatest success at work? In life?
58. What was the most fun thing you ever did?
59. Have you ever smoked? If yes, at what age did you quit?
60. How has your health been throughout your life? Any major illnesses?
61. In your lifetime, have you been on special diets or exercise programs to stay healthy?
62. What advice do you have for younger people about work?
63. What advice do you have for younger people about health?
64. What advice do you have for younger people about money?
65. What advice do you have for younger people about marriage?
66. What advice do you have for younger people about parenting?
67. What advice do you have for younger people about life in general?
68. Do you feel your chronological age? If not, what age do you feel?
69. Do you still drive a car? If not, at what age did you stop driving?
70. Have you experienced a lot of stress during your life?
71. Which season of your life have you enjoyed most? Why?
72. How did the events of 9/11/2001 affect you?
73. Would you like to live to be 100? Why or why not?

Platinum Centenarian Years
74. Did you ever think you would live to be 100?
75. What’s the greatest thing about being your age?
76. What’s your secret for living to your age?
77. Do you still vote?
78. Who was your favourite U.S. President? Why?
79. If you could give one piece of advice to the current president, what would it be?
80. Who did you admire the most in your lifetime?
81. Who influenced your character most?
82. What role does God, religion, or spirituality play in your life today?
83. What activities do you most enjoy today?
84. Do you: read, watch TV, cook, play music, etc.?
85. What types of books, TV shows, food, music do you enjoy most?
86. Do you use any of the following: cell phone, Internet, voice mail, iPod, computer, e-mail, DVDs, or CDs?
87. Of all the inventions during your lifetime, which one(s) changed your life the most?
88. What has been the key to your happiness?
89. What do you consider to be your greatest success in your life?
90. What is your greatest memory — the one that warms your heart?
91. Do you have any regrets?
92. Are there any opportunities that passed you by or dreams you didn’t pursue?
93. How do you define the word ‘rich’?
94. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about education?
95. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about marriage?
96. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about money?
97. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about debt?
98. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about saving?
99. What wisdom and advice would you give to the younger generation today about health?
100. What do you still want to accomplish in your life?
101. How would you like others to remember you?
Young Chroniclers

Young people are motivated by personalities not processes. Elderly people enjoy the company of youth and gladly communicate with them. Post-Millennials have all the technical know-how to capture rich multi-media personal histories. Reliving (www.reliving.co.uk), a graduate start-up company in the UK has created a mobile platform to assist people in capturing personal and 3rd party life histories, including interview question prompts.

Capturing stories of victory, failures, of poverty and wealth, upbringing, places lived, places worked and family history in multimedia time capsule, will provide an intimate and important part of life legacy to be passed onto generations to come.

Creating a digital time capsule provides an organised and periodic system which can store all media in order.

Benefits:
- Your family will appreciate seeing your life and theirs in a periodic order
- They will learn about family members and recognise events in their life story
- This strengthens the family heritage and culture, and sense of belonging
- Chroniclers can use video, letters, voice recording, music, geo-tagging and AR technology. – Keepsakes that can be passed on throughout the generations
- Family members can include their final words, pass on advice and inspirational stories

Digital Life Story creation

There is no better way to continue the memory inheritance and family life story than to have it digitally stored.

- Digital Memories can be inherited and continued for future generations. There is expansive room to continue adding to it.
- Record life stories on the go: People travel everywhere with their own digital recording mobile phone. We've never had it so easy to record memories in real-time.
- You can sit with your children and grandchildren in years to come and show them life stories at any place and anytime. You won't have to search the house top to bottom to find a dusty memory book that can get damaged or lost.
- You can use a multi-range of media to create a well-rounded and interesting digital life story to best represent your life. From photos, videos, text, photos, voice recordings, geo-tagging and AR technology.

By encouraging our youth to Invest in the present, they can unveil the past and enrich the future.

Points to ponder

- How can we best introduce young people to capturing living memories beyond traditional social media?
- What tools and platforms can we provide our young chroniclers?
- Are the traditional processes of Genealogical research a hindrance to engagement?
- What is the best age to issue the challenge?
- How can we best set an example and inspire others?