

Prometheus – Blending Fictional and Real Worlds



A Transmedia Marketing Case Study by Anne Zeiser

Serving as both story and marketing, the live-event, video, and digital prelude to Ridley Scott's 2012 film, *Prometheus* created an immersive and expansive fictional story world around the film that imaginatively entered audiences' real worlds.

Creative firm, Ignition had the huge challenge to create a breakthrough campaign for 20th Century Fox because *Prometheus* was up against a crowded field of franchise films based on well-known heroes targeting similar audiences, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *The Avengers*. Still, they recognized that the dedicated clan of sci-fi buffs and devotees of Scott's earlier films, *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, could become invaluable ambassadors if activated as a community.

The film's key release strategy, which Scott helped create, was to keep the 3-D film shrouded in mystery (leveraging the widespread speculation that it was a prequel to *Alien*). *Prometheus*' transmedia campaign plan was to tease the secretive project with strategically-released digital and physical assets – videos, high-resolution art, Web sites, business cards, and experiential art – embedded with clues to unravel the film's secret future world. The campaign pillars would be three videos that propelled the story and universe forward, connecting the growing stable of assets, and satisfying and teasing in equal measure. If this content went viral among superfans, it would ratchet up levels of awareness, engagement, and mystery.

So all of the campaign's content was designed to keep audiences asking more questions, fueling speculation about whether the film took place on a distant planet or a derelict space ship. By the time the traditional marketing campaign of posters, trailers, and advertising hit the marketplace, the heightened enthusiasm among a growing base of passionate fans would spill over to broader audiences.

Open-ended questions are one of the most effective ways to engage and create conversation. That idea was at the heart of Prometheus. Beyond the story, beyond everything else. The goal was to keep people asking questions by giving them a drip-feed of content that created even more questions.

– **Chris Eyerman, creative director 3AM; formerly executive creative director of digital, Ignition; *Prometheus*, *Hunger Games*, *Arrested Development***

It all kicked off four months before *Prometheus*' June 8th release to unsuspecting audiences at the 2012 TED (Technology, Education, Design) conference – the elite annual gathering of international thought leaders sharing “Ideas Worth Spreading.” On February 28th in Long Beach, CA, Fox presented a TED Talk from the future in the form of a three minute video entitled “[Peter Weyland TED Talk 2023](#).” Conceived by director, Ridley Scott and film co-screenwriter, Damon Lindelof and directed by Scott’s son, Luke Scott, this *first* key video was a stand-alone entertainment experience, introducing backstory, a seminal character, and the film’s meta mystery.

In the approved on-stage TED style, a young Peter Weyland, the founder of the fictional Weyland Industries, delivered a TED Talk about his vision for the future set in 2023 – some 50 years before the film’s outer space adventure. Actor Guy Pearce, who played the elderly industrialist Weyland in the film, gave a riveting, but eerie address about the state of human nature in a future inhabited by “cybernetic individuals who, in just a few short years, will be completely indistinguishable from us.” He referenced the Greek Titan god, Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and unleashed an unstoppable force. Weyland entreated audiences, “If you’ll indulge me, I’d like to change the world.” His mysterious talk ended with the URL to the campaign’s hub, Weyland Industries’ corporate Web site www.weylandindustries.com.

The video’s producers had worked with TED organizers to create what they envisioned an authentic TED Talk would be like in 2023, including flying cameras and real-time Twitter-like feeds on screen. The video was broadcast live and posted on TED’s blog, driving traffic to the Weyland site. Launching the first video (and clue) at TED gave the campaign a high profile and unexpected audience of influentials. In turn, it gave TED.com millions of new visitors. A unique and symbiotic partnership.



TEDTalk screenshot/TechFleece.com

A young Peter Weyland delivers a TED Talk set in 2023, setting up backstory for the secretive future *Prometheus* mission.

With their curiosities piqued, audiences learned more about Peter Weyland and his company at the Weyland Industries Web site, which both promoted and expanded *Prometheus*' futurist sci-fi universe. This film preview site looked like an authentic corporate site, replete with “Products” and “Company News” sections and a mission statement, “At Weyland Industries we apply science, technology and our unparalleled global network of resources to the pursuit of

Building Better Worlds.” Audiences were encouraged by Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail to sign up on the site as investors (unknowingly supporting the Prometheus space mission) or as potential crew members on the top-secret mission. As the digital campaign progressed, audiences could participate in a virtual scavenger hunt to unlock new sections of the Web site and reveal additional content.

Eventually, audiences would learn that Weyland Industries was the backer of the late 21st century exploratory research, Project Prometheus, which placed the film’s characters in a distant world seeking truths about the origins of humanity. On this mission to the far corners of the universe – played out in the feature film – the explorers would encounter a threat that could cause the extinction of the human race.

As audiences dug deeper into the Web site, they uncovered a star on the “About Us” page that blinked in Morse Code. When deciphered and entered as a URL, the code led to a secret directory on the site with a stunning high-res image of a star map. This preview of the film’s story world was later shown in the teaser trailer and in the feature film in the pilot room of the ship of the Engineers, the human ancestors central to the film’s plot. This image instantly went viral, amplifying buzz from the TED Talk and catalyzing even more interest and conjecture about the goal and location of the mysterious mission. To fully engage audiences, the campaign consistently rewarded resourceful superfans with first looks at new content and recognition on the project’s social platforms of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.



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***Prometheus*’ high-res star map buried on the Weyland Industries Web site, which went viral.**

In early March, audience investors in Weyland’s mission received an e-mail alerting them about two new additions to the site. The first was the 83-year “Timeline” of the company revealing Peter Weyland’s background, including his knighthood at a young age, his successful reversal of global warming in 2016, and his receipt of the Nobel Prize for those efforts. Participants also saw product and corporate milestones such as new generations of the Andrew android and the company becoming a worldwide partner of the Olympics in 2071. But one of the most important entries was on January 1, 2073 when the company determined “the exact

coordinates of a new destination for the long-time pet project: Project Prometheus. New round of investment is immediately opened and mission planning enters full-swing." The second new Web site section was "Invest in your Future" with sharable infographics about the company's finances and funding for Project Prometheus, and a photograph from the funded project. These clues and new content also went viral – shared and scrutinized within the growing fan base.

Later that month, the campaign designers used a more expected event, WonderCon in Anaheim, CA (a Comic-Con event) to boost excitement. Before the event, influencers including entertainment and fan bloggers and superfans received translucent Weyland Industries business cards with the logo, company Web address, and phone number, **WEYLAND. When dialed, the recorded message touted Weyland products and alluded to a big upcoming announcement. Callers then received a text message linking to a teaser video, "Big Things Have Small Beginnings," which was the first 20 seconds of the *second* key campaign video. It showed Weyland Industry's flagship android, the David 8, being unwrapped out of its product box.



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Weyland Industries business cards with a revelatory phone number.

WonderCon attendees also received these business cards on site from Weyland Industry "employees" circulating throughout. At the event, Damon Lindelof moderated a panel with Ridley Scott, Charlize Theron, and Micheal Fassbender, punctuated by questions from social media followers. Attendees learned that Fassbender played the key character in the film, the David 8, the next gen android that serves as the butler/maintenance man on the Prometheus space ship. They also got a first look at the film's one-minute theatrical [teaser trailer](#) showing glimpses of the film's key characters and the terrifying quest ahead. The entire event was live-streamed through Facebook, Twitter, and AMC Theater's Web site.

In mid-April, after the conference, Fox released the full version of the highly-anticipated *second* video, "Happy Birthday David" online through an exclusive placement with publication, [Mashable](#), and on TV with Verizon FiOS subscribers. The two and one-half minute new product launch video featured Fassbender as the David 8, first, unwrapped from the product box. Then, the off-screen narrator asked a fully activated David 8 about his product features. In a mechanical, but somewhat life-like expression, David answered. "I can do almost anything that could possibly be asked of me. I can assist your employees. I can make your organization more efficient. I can carry out directives that my human counterparts might find...distressing or unethical." David explained that he understands human emotion, though doesn't experience feelings. "This allows me to be more efficient and capable – and makes it easier for my human counterparts to interact with me." David shed a tear to make the point.

As part of its partnership with *Prometheus*, Verizon created a VOD channel on its FiOS network dedicated to exclusive *Prometheus* content including the David 8 video, TV spots, and an interactive tour of the *Prometheus* ship.

Concurrent with the David 8 product video release, key superfans and influencers received a series of eight images, each with binary codes on them spelling out a word with one of David's human emotions, such as anger or confidence. Entering all eight emotions into a field on the Weyland Industries' Web site unlocked the "David 8 Product Page." So, fans furiously shared these emotions with each other. These big reveals of the David 8 video and product Web page boosted Web and social traffic to its zenith, garnering more than 10 million views in its first few days and tens of millions thereafter.

Further enhancing the integrity of the *Prometheus* universe, David 8 communicated directly with fans through his own Twitter account. And to maximize the hype around the David video and character, Fox developed an in-universe David 8 launch print campaign with full-page ads in *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*.



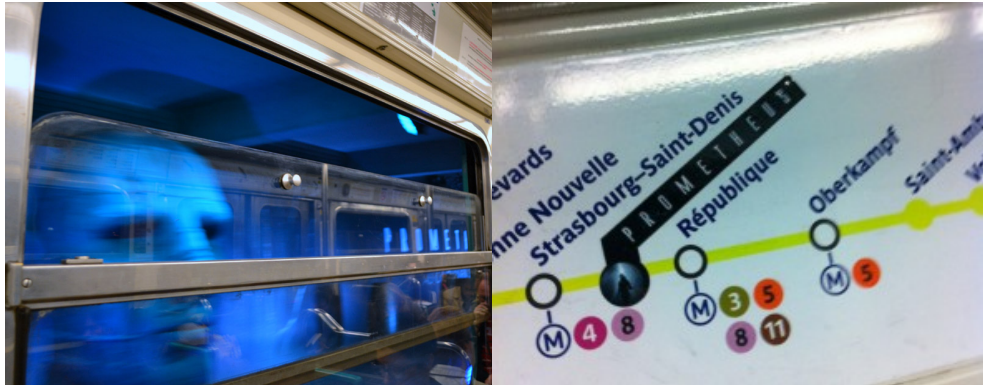
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The David 8 product launch ad.

*All of these pieces were designed around things people are interested in already. People love TED Talks, so you should do something around TED Talks. People are always interested in the latest thing that Apple or Facebook's going to launch around a new technology product. So take that idea and premiere a new technology product for *Prometheus* (David 8) through Mashable. It's about taking the tactics and things people are already doing in culture and social, and designing your story to take shape around those things. That's what was very different about this campaign.*

– Chris Eyerman, creative director 3AM; formerly executive creative director of digital, Ignition; *Prometheus*, *Hunger Games*, *Arrested Development*

Meanwhile, on line 9 of the Paris Métro in France, the Saint-Martin ghost station (real train stations that were closed, many during WWII), was transformed into the eerie cave with the monolithic 3-D human head and stone cylinders that the *Prometheus* crew found during the film inside the artificial structure on a distant moon. Riders got a glimpse of this foreboding world as they sped by and linked it to *Prometheus* through the altered Métro maps.



@d3smo/Twitter

The 3-D stone head and altered map of the transformed *Prometheus* ghost station on the Paris Métro.

The final month before *Prometheus*' release, the campaign focused on audiences becoming mission crew members. To determine whether fans were suitable for space exploration with Weyland, the "Careers" section of the Web site used groundbreaking HTML technology engineered by Microsoft's Internet Explorer team challenging fans to solve a Rubik Cube-like repetitive memory test. Once solved, it provided a URL that led to the Weyland Industries Training Center. Fans became Weyland "employees" and were issued official employee ID cards. To broaden this aspect of the campaign, the team used an unexpected vehicle, LinkedIn to recruit fans to work for Weyland Industries. They sent personalized "InMails" (paid alerts) from Weyland's Corporate Recruiting Office to influencers, urging them to apply for a job with the company and take part in the Training Center experience. Reporters from *Forbes* to the *New York Observer* were "recruited" and wrote about the guerrilla tactic.

Two weeks before the film's launch, the project released the *third* key video, "[Quiet Eye](#)" on Verizon FiOS's Facebook Page introducing Noomi Rapace's character, anthropologist Dr. Elizabeth Shaw and her classified work on Project Genesis. Shaw had found the star map at several unconnected ancient cultures and viewed it as an invitation. Her one and one-half minute video was a Skype-like direct plea to Peter Weyland to fund her research on the origins of mankind. Fans assisted Dr. Shaw in her work by searching across social media platforms and editorial sites for ancient artifacts that would lead to the discovery of the Engineers' planet. Fans shared information and together unlocked the hidden prize of notebooks of her work.

In those final days before *Prometheus*' release, fans were treated to more online assets and content, delivering more backstory. A second Web site, "[Discover New Worlds](#)" allowed fans to fly the *Prometheus* ship and discover the 63 colonies established by Weyland. It also encouraged fans to find and assemble the film's key art, broken into 20 pieces. Finally, during the campaign's final event, E3 on June 4, Microsoft's Marc Whitten demonstrated how Internet Explorer and Xbox Smartglass could present video, using an exclusive clip from the *Prometheus* film to showcase their new technology.

And, even as part of the film's premiere, the campaign fed superfans by continuing the mystery with one more Easter egg. A final end credit card showed the Weyland logo, the tagline "Building Better Worlds Since 10.11.12," and the URL to the timeline. This led audiences to the Web site, www.WhatIs101112.com with a puzzle that unlocked a short clip of Peter Weyland from a longer, unedited version of the TED Talk (also included in the home video version of the film). The site also featured an oblique presentation of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, keeping audiences guessing about its significance. This site later became a portal for the film's home video products.

There was so much engagement and buzz from the digital campaign that general audiences were pulled into the transmedia mystery and mythology, speculating about what the film's Project Prometheus characters would find as they searched a distant colony for clues to the origins of mankind. The campaign engaged superfans and mainstream audiences alike because of the widespread hype and because the traditional marketing materials of one-sheet, trailers, events, and advertising amplified the mystery by keeping the film's plot, location, and appearance of the alien creatures a secret.

The campaign worked well within the mythology in the film. Everything worked together as holistic product experience, which is really what a film experience like that should be. So that was our measure of success.

– Chris Eyerman, creative director 3AM; formerly executive creative director of digital, Ignition; *Prometheus*, *Hunger Games*, *Arrested Development*

Hailed by *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, and *Mashable* for its innovation and pervasiveness, the campaign garnered some 3 billion media impressions, including tens of millions of video views. It won *Hollywood Reporter* Key Art Awards for Web Site and for Innovative Media, and won the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity's Gold Branded Content and Entertainment Lion and Bronze Cyber Lion. *Prometheus* made \$403 million worldwide, more than tripling its \$125 million production budget. A sequel is scheduled for 2016.

Prometheus' integrated digital and experiential campaign immersed audiences in the mythology from the get-go. The campaign blended the story's fictional universe with the audience's real world by leveraging real-life events and assets; it shaped the stream of content leading up to the film into an intriguing prequel narrative that propelled the mythology forward; it heightened the mystery around the film with a drip-feed of in-universe content, amplified by the teaser traditional marketing materials; and, it blended the story and its promotion into a single storytelling enterprise.

Inspired by an interview with Chris Eyerman, creative director 3AM; formerly executive creative director of digital, Ignition; *Prometheus*, *Hunger Games*, *Arrested Development*.

