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Hotel Nothing: A Transmedia Franchise

Link to promotional video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59kjQkaBMN0>

Introduction/Overview

We are heading into a time where both producers and consumers are looking for the next big transmedia franchise. It is no longer acceptable to just pitch a story that can only survive in one media. You must deliver a broad world, consisting of various characters and stories, that can unfold across numerous media platforms. (Jenkins, 2006) *Hotel Nothing* is a terrific example of a story that has enough mythology behind it to develop it into a transmedia franchise.

In the summer of 2006, I conceived a story idea after watching the music video for *The Kill* by 30 Seconds to Mars. Thus *Hotel Nothing* was created. *Hotel Nothing* is the two book story of 16-year-old Gracious Constantine and her 14-year-old brother Sinner. Extremely jealous of his perfect older sister, Sinner spends his time drawing strange and disturbing pictures of an imaginary world he calls *Hotel Nothing*. In this world, Sinner is worshiped by his creations while his sister is detested.

On Gracious' birthday, the Constantine family goes on a road trip and stops at a hotel on the first night. Sinner is amazed to see that it is named *Hotel Nothing* and he enters the hotel with Gracious while their parents get the suitcases from the car. The two teenagers quickly realize that *Hotel Nothing* is no ordinary hotel when they become trapped inside. To calm Gracious down, Sinner admits that he created the hotel and anything he draws in his special sketchbook comes to life. However, everything goes terribly wrong when Sinner learns he is no longer in control of his world and all the inhabitants of *Hotel Nothing* want to murder the teens.

Hotel Nothing is just the first book series in what I hope will be at least 4 book series. In the other book series, several young adults will go through ordeals similar to the ones that Gracious and Sinner face in *Hotel Nothing*. Throughout all of the books, there will be clues that each of these book series tie together and exist in the same nightmarish universe.

Hotel Nothing as a Transmedia Franchise

A number of questions need to be considered before *Hotel Nothing* is developed into a transmedia franchise. Who is the audience? How are individuals going to experience the story? What will be the entry points? The world that the story takes place in must be studied to know what pieces of the world are best for which media platforms and audiences. (Dinehart, 2009) If done right, *Hotel Nothing* has the potential to entertain and connect with a wide range of consumers.

Book Series: The *Hotel Nothing* books would obviously be the birth of the franchise, with other mediums following that. There are two books in the series. The first establishes the conflict between the siblings and introduces the world to readers. The second delves deeper into the world and is when most of Gracious and Sinner's struggles against the monsters of *Hotel Nothing* happen.

Films: Two *Hotel Nothing* films could be used to gain popularity and get the attention of a larger, more commercial audience. Despite maintaining the same plot as the books, the films would offer the opportunity look into aspects of the world that aren't included in the books. Speaking from my own experience, the films could also persuade moviegoers to read the books so they can weigh the two against each other.

Television/Animated Series: Unlike the films, a *Hotel Nothing* television series wouldn't follow the exact plot of the books. New plots and characters could be invented, loosely based on the original story. The series would probably air on a channel like The CW.

To reach a younger audience, the books could be adapted into an animated series. With the success of shows like *Scooby Doo* and *Courage: The Cowardly Dog*, airing the series on Cartoon Network would be the wisest choice. The animated series would allow children to work their way up and, as they grow older, encounter the franchise in other media. This will build a lasting fan base that can grow up with the franchise over many years.

Graphic Novels/Manga/Anime: Graphic novels and manga are incredibly popular among children, teens, and adults (Davis, 2004). *Hotel Nothing* graphic novels would be directed at a darker and mature audience, highlighting intense and dreadful elements. Ideas deemed too horrific for other mediums might find a place in the graphic novels. Also, graphic novels are another way to introduce reluctant readers to the franchise.

Video Games: Through *Hotel Nothing* video games, fans would be able to become the characters instead of passively experiencing the story from the outside. This medium could make the

franchise even more entertaining. As either Gracious or Sinner, players would fight their way through the hotel and explore parts of *Hotel Nothing* that haven't been previously shown.

Toys: At any point in the franchise, toys and costumes can be manufactured so young fans will be able to dream up their own adventures that go beyond the books, films, video games, etc. *Hotel Nothing* toys might include: Dolls, action figures, board games, stuffed animals, and so on.

Social Networks: Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are wonderful places to boost collective intelligence. Also, social networks can connect all of the media platforms that *Hotel Nothing* has a presence on, linking the books to the television series to the video games. There are quite a few ways that the franchise can utilize social media:

1. Facebook = Behind-the-scenes photos and videos; announcements about where to find additional information or fun facts
2. Twitter = Conversations or responses to questions about the series/franchise
3. YouTube = Commercials for the films and television/animated series; creator/actor interviews; video responses to fans' questions; original video contests

Official Website: All other media platforms would eventually lead back to the official website, the main spot for fan interaction. On this site, individuals will have numerous ways to dig deeper into the franchise. They will be able to:

1. View character bios
2. Find out more about legends from the books, films, and shows
3. Get into characters' heads through personal journals
4. Take a tour and see characters' belongings
5. Play games
6. Take quizzes
7. Create their own unique characters
8. Write fanfiction stories
9. Communicate on the discussion board
10. Become site members so they will receive important alerts before non-members

As the creator of *Hotel Nothing*, I would often exercise some control over the website. Yet, I would be very flexible and permit individuals to have many rights (within reason). For example, fanfiction authors will have the freedom to write just about anything, as long as it isn't for profits.

Launching the Franchise

There are various steps to creating a successful transmedia franchise. First, the quality of at least a few of the media platforms needs to be tested by the eyes of fresh viewers/users/players.

Second, feedback should be collected. Third, the franchise ought to be updated often to keep the audience from losing interest. (Dinehard, 2009)

Once the *Hotel Nothing* books have a loyal and good-sized fan base, the films will be released to add to those numbers. If the films have much success, then the franchise can move on to the next step. In response to the audience's demand, video games and graphic novels will be sold. The focus will then shift from the teen/adult audience to a younger fan base. To increase the interest of children, the animated series will be advertised and eventually aired on Cartoon Network. Once more, the next course of action will depend on the audience's reaction to the franchise. If everything goes as planned, toys will be marketed towards fans of the animated series (as well as the books, films, and video games). So the franchise won't lose the older audience during this time, a television series will be produced and broadcast on The CW not long after the animated series finishes its first season. Both the television series and animated series may attract a tween audience, considering the age range would place it right between the two demographics for the shows.

Lastly, social network pages and the official website will be designed as places where the various fan bases can gather and make connections between the franchise's mediums. The pleasure of a transmedia franchise emanates from the hunt for information in multiple mediums. On the other hand, the search cannot be too demanding, since that will only discourage individuals from dipping deeper into the franchise. (Jenkins, 2006) The goal is to encourage commercial and grassroots participation/interaction that will ultimately strengthen the franchise's reputation over the years.

Similar Franchises

Hotel Nothing is hardly the first scary/suspenseful franchise to utilize the strategy that I have just discussed. Tim Burton's *The Nightmare before Christmas* has been a successful franchise ever since 1993, when the stop motion film was released. Over the years, the film was followed by a short story, character figures, costumes, other clothing and accessories, a trading card game, and a video game.

Goosebumps, created by the renowned R.L. Stine, began as a series of children's horror novels. The spooky books spawned two television series, several films, video games, clothing, board games, a stage play, a Disney World attraction, and an official website. *Hotel Nothing* can only hope to follow in this great franchise's footsteps.

Lastly, *Hotel Nothing* shares many similarities with the CW television series *Supernatural*, which is slowly developing into a franchise. After the success of the show, *Supernatural* began building a franchise with tie-ins and spin-offs (such as the animated series), comics,

merchandise, and novels. One of the reasons the franchise is so successful is because *Supernatural* has a very dedicated fan base (commercial and grassroots). The producers of the show are always sure to acknowledge their audience and respond to fan demands.

Conclusion

My hope is that, through a gradual and calculated plan, the world of *Hotel Nothing* will grow with each media platform that it touches and enrich the entertainment experience of as many audiences as possible. Although this is a profitable franchise, the needs and interaction of the audience must always be taken into account. The world behind a story may be the backbone of any strong franchise. However, fans have the power to say whether that backbone is made of steel or is forever shattered.

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Video Sources (Urls)

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Dollhouse picture =

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Boy Doll picture = <http://fsb.zedge.net/content/4/1/7/5/1-6430011-4175-t.jpg>

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Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events Trailer video =
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWB1HGnA3tA>

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Danny Phantom Opening video =
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Sabrina the Animated Series video =
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Lightning video = <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwGqIuLwscI&feature=related>

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rmwVmeNE9I&list=PL3869E96BC994E054&index=71&feature=plpp_video

Song = *The Bird and the Worm* by The Used

