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## Media Exchange

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New trends are taking on social networking sites. There was also an array of friendly websites doing the rounds like Batchmate and Orkut, etc., which attempted to connect lost friends. Yet others let you connect to new people. There are also some emerging social networks on the Internet that are bringing about a revolution in the way we connect and communicate with the world. These have helped turn social networking into a serious business.

Youth Media Exchange (ymex.org) is a new social networking website that empowers youth worldwide to create, share, and discuss digital media about global issues. Through online social networking and digital media production, new ways of learning and collaborating emerge that enable the youth to become a driving force in creating and shaping a shared future in an increasingly interconnected world. By creating collections of related resources and media, developing and displaying projects with peers in other countries, and responding and reflecting through online

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discussions, it encourages the youth to build digital media literacy skills and knowledge necessary for university and work in a global age. It also gives educators the opportunity

## Feature Web 2.0

to work with the youth media producers and collaborate on the content collaborators at ymex.org. Thus, it allows an informed approach to education and growth in media and media-related aspects.

In a free-wheeling interview, Natalie Rodic (31 years), a Project Coordinator with ymex.org, describes the utility of the website in detail and shares with us how to effectively make use of intelligent social networking websites.

### Tell us a little about yourself

I have a background in the performing arts. In fact, I have also been a teacher and a producer. But then, I made an exciting transition into digital media and global affairs. It's been four years now. Issues related to social justice fascinate me and I love to fight for positive change. I have lived in New York City for almost nine years now and have recently obtained my Master's in International Affairs with a focus in Media in Development. I have tried my hands at making a couple of documentary videos and have expanded my knowledge of the complexities of international development as well as the potentials for media to be a positive force. However, at the end of it all, I have an insatiable appetite for travel and love to experience new places and the people living therein.

### What is your job profile at YMEX?

As the Project Coordinator and Community Manager at ymex.org, I am involved with all the aspects of designing, developing, launching, and monitoring the website. But my primary role is outreach and availability to all those involved: partners, youth media groups, and finally the ymex community.

### Is it easy managing a website like YMEX?

I am not really sure since we haven't launched as yet. I can imagine it will not be easy, but I'm sure it will be fun as well.

Developing the website has been a challenge though because we are doing some really ground-breaking things there.

### TIG has taken shape as one of the most prominent networking website with a purpose. Then, why did you decide to come up with YMEX?

Ymex.org was the result of a collaboration between the creative minds of Global Kids, TakingITGlobal, and Asia Society. We knew we could be a big hit together as partners,



and we wanted to test out the platforms of social networks that were really focused on digital media and learning. TakingITGlobal has plenty to offer but it doesn't really have that one niche focus like what ymex.org has.

### What does YMEX basically deal with?

Ymex.org deals with youth-produced digital media such as photos or digital artwork, video, games, songs, or podcasts, blogs, and mash-ups. In fact, it deals with anything that has a social message to convey. The goal is to encourage young people to experiment with different kinds of media production tools and also to keep them abreast on issues related to our global community, whether at the local or global level. Next, we are hoping members will make friends and collaborate on media productions with youth in other countries. An example would be: a high-school student in South Korea is in an after-school program learning how to make digital video. He has recently seen some documentary on a place where people are affected by the shortage of drinking water. Another high-school student in New Delhi has worked with villagers on the same issue but has never made a video, and perhaps doesn't have access to a camera. They meet on ymex.org, discovering they have a similar interest on an issue. Based on a proposal to complete a 'quest' (that is a step-by-step learning activity) and make a public awareness campaign about access to water, the



two decide to put their ideas and knowledge together and make a video for this quest.

## What should a member do when he joins YMEX?

The step is to edit their profile and then try to acquire as much knowledge about the website as possible. This can be done by regularly checking on the content posted. The next thing to do is to start commenting on the content that has been posted followed by linking to the digital media that he or she knows about, finding other people with similar interests, etc. There are other exciting possibilities for engagement as well but these are some of the basic things one must do.

## What kind of participants are you looking at for the website? Is the website designed for one and all?

The website has been designed keeping in mind the youth – between the age group of 13 and 19. And we are targeting outreach in China, India, South Korea, and the U.S. Yet, at the end of it all, we are not restricting the website at all, so anyone of any age can join. A look at the list of those who have pre-registered will confirm that fact that it is going to be very global in scope.

Some pointers to make effective use of the website.

Just experiment and play with the resources that we will have listed. There are countless free open source software and many online tools. So, the possibilities for creating digital media are endless – and free!

Be brave and bold to reach out to others. Once you reach out to people, you must learn to keep engaged in meaningful conversation and learn from each other.

Enhance your ability to discuss media and global issues; make this a space where you can sharpen your critical



thinking and discussion skills!

Be sensitive and supportive to others. This is not only a website for award-winning documentaries, but also a space for those who are just getting their feet wet.

## What do you stand to achieve with the website?

As I mentioned earlier, we hope to connect people with each other across the globe so they are able to sharpen their production and critical thinking skills – this can prove beneficial to their higher education and career goals. In a wider perspective, we hope to contribute to the larger field of digital media and learning where there are a number of researchers and scholars trying to understand the effects of digital media on young people's lives.

## You have chosen to launch this website primarily in India and China. Any specific reason why?

Actually, you can add South Korea to the list as well. In quoting my colleague, Alexis Menten, at the Asia Society, "Asia and the United States have been connected geopolitically, economically, and culturally for centuries." This is certainly true, but also the level of interest in technology, media, and global education has been demonstrated in those countries. It seemed like a good place to start! We'll expand outreach to other regions of the world in the next phase of the project if things go well.

## Would there be any content management in the website, to control what published and what does not?

There is no approval process. Everything that is submitted to the website will go up immediately. We will monitor what has been posted, based on our guidelines. Anything inappropriate will be removed. In fact, the members will be able to flag content themselves. ■

