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Transmedia to launch mixed media comic

'Are You Awake' project to be unveiled at N.Y.'s Comic Con

By Etan Vlessing

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TORONTO -- Transmedia content these days comes to market in peculiar ways.

Vancouver-based investment banker-turned new media producer Keith Turner has a detective book he penned on an Internet-to-TV journey that starts this weekend with a mixed reality comic book and mobile app to be unveiled at New York's Comic Con.

With first-round financing from Content Films on board as a distributor for his "Are You Awake" entertainment property, Turner is also selling potential investors on a web series, a potential movie, an extended alternate reality game on social media channels like Twitter and Facebook, digital music and even a fashion line.

"We think we have the cooking instructions for some high-grade spaghetti so that there's a better chance that content will stick to the wall," he explained.

The "Are You Awake" property follows the model of another Canadian Internet-to-primetime transplant, Syfy's "Sanctuary," and has signed up genre actors Ryan Robbins ("Stargate: Atlantis"), Alana Husband, Jessica Harmon and Michael Eklund for a web series.

But Turner's property has many more mass media products launching at once to minimize risk and quicken a potential pay-back for investors.

The transmedia property is based on a classic detective thriller penned by Turner, but which will start life as a comic book with artwork by DC and Marvel Comics artist Richard Pace.

To add motion and other digital elements to the comic book, including social media and an iPhone app, Turner has turned to Vancouver-based new media producer Zeroes 2 Heroes.

Matt Honer, president of Zeroes 2 Heroes, said readers of the comic book will be encouraged to connect with other cross-media products to get pulled into the story, but it's not a necessity to follow and discover new story points.

Honer said the "Are You Awake" property will not follow the lead, for example, of the Wachowski brothers and their "Matrix" trilogy, which included comic books, video games and DVD releases.

"To really understand the ('Matrix') story, you kind of had to do everything, you kind of had to play the game, and the game was a little hard at times," he insisted.

"We like to find those places where people opt in," Honer added, without coming up against insurmountable roadblocks.

Comic Con attendees this coming weekend will receive a 32-page "Are You Awake" comic book that allows them to connect to an alternate reality game with live actors via their smartphones to receive clues on how to solve an online mystery.

Users can also acquire rewards on the "Are You Awake" social network, including unique avatars, a sound track and wallpapers for mobile devices and desktop computers.

The strategy is to build a fan base for the transmedia property to entice more investors, production partners and distributors to jump on board.

"If we can turn over an online following that shows a 20,000, a 50,000 or a 100,000 audience, we've reduced the speculative nature of the property," Turner, ever the risk-sensitive investment banker, insisted.

"And you've determined some level of interest before you go and blow your brains out," he added.

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