

SCORCHED MAKES HOT CROSS- PLATFORM MODEL

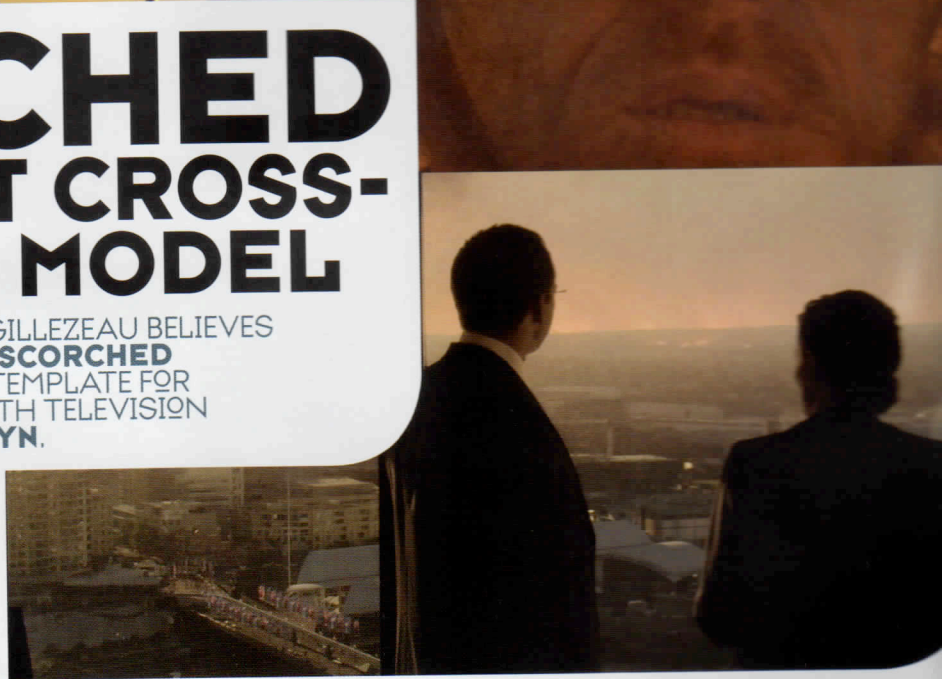
INTERACTIVE PRODUCER MARCUS GILLEZEAU BELIEVES HIS UPCOMING ALL-MEDIA DRAMA **SCORCHED** WILL BECOME THE NEW INDUSTRY TEMPLATE FOR INTEGRATING ONLINE CONTENT WITH TELEVISION DRAMA, HE TELLS **SIMON DE BRUYN**.

DESPITE DELIVERING THE completed *Scorched* telemovie to Channel Nine in August, Marcus Gillezeau and the team at Firelight Productions are still knee-deep in post production at 2 Dogs Post in Sydney. While this sounds as if Gillezeau is using quantum physics and time travel to beat deadlines, the post-work is actually for the vast online drama that he's building around the telemovie.

Scorched is being billed as an all-media drama. Set in 2012, it postulates what would happen should Sydney's water supply run out and the city be hit by massive fires. In addition to the telemovie, the drama will unfold online using viral videos on YouTube, social networking websites such as Facebook, fake company websites and an online TV channel featuring 120 minutes of scripted "news" footage hosted by none other than Channel Nine newsreader Mark Ferguson. All of this will be original content, and none of it will be culled from the material made for television.

The day **INSIDE**FILM visits the offices, Firelight is busy cutting together a political advertisement featuring Georgie Parker's *Scorched* character, building a fake company website for Argon Energy, and scripting a new viral video. Gillezeau explains that when he conceived the project with fellow Firelight producer (and partner) Ellenor Cox back in 2003, the aim was always to make it multi-platform in its execution.

"We thought that if we were going to make a cautionary tale about the management of water in Australia, then it would be pointless to deliver it as a one-off telemovie. We wanted to build something around it so that we can actually set up a universe where the events of the drama would be inevitable," he says.



a 90-minute drama on another medium, television, but you can watch it on your mobile, or the internet, wherever you like."

Indeed the universe is so complete that the online news channel will also be broadcasting fake sports, finance and weather updates – with weather graphics done by the same team at Channel Nine that build the 6pm news graphics – as well as the news reports of water shortages, rural refugees, out of control bushfires and dust storms. One of the reasons the drama is so comprehensive is that Firelight has been building its online expertise since Cox and Gillezeau formed the production company in 1998.

In 1999 they made a one-hour documentary for Channel 7 called *The Big Voyage*, with a documentary crew on a 16th century ship which was doing a re-enactment voyage through Indonesian waters, and they decided to produce a whole series of brief episodes of life on board the ship, and then put these online to build an audience for the documentary. People came to the website in droves and their requests resulted in certain episodes being filmed which weren't originally planned.

"It was arguably the first independently produced, fully convergent documentary in Australia, and really made us look further into online content and how best we could take advantage of being able to tell our stories across multiple platforms rather

importantly the conservative commercial network – to start developing more large scale all-media productions that feature expansive online drama that add to a television experience.

"There's been numerous firsts on this production and the format bible we will be producing for this will be invaluable to the industry. All the content we have produced for the online component was shot specifically for the web, using the same name actors from the telemovie – Georgie Parker, Vince Colosimo and Cameron Daddo – and this schedule was incorporated into the main unit schedule. So the online team wasn't just an appendage but an integral part of the whole production," he says.

He is amazed it's taken this long for the networks to actually come to the party (original content merged with TV is not exactly new) and says that while a project like *Scorched* shows the mentality is changing, what's needed next is the money to match it.

"It's just insane that the last drama of this scale that was produced in Australia was *Fat Cow Man* that was an original drama that was delivered across all platforms that was nearly six years ago. There's a lot of little productions such as *PS Tivo* and *For the Pales* but nothing on a large scale," he says.

"The thing is that we still don't have the budget of a mega drama like *Sea Patrol* or *Underbelly*."