

4IP: What (or who) is Channel 4's £50 million digital fund for?

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Imagine up to £50 million being handed out to digital creatives. Think how much ground-breaking innovation that could stimulate. Well, that's what Channel 4 are planning to do with their [4IP](#) initiative to be properly launched this summer.

I am speaking at a [conference](#) in a couple of weeks where they hope to garner ideas for how to spend the dosh. But what is [4IP](#)?

It's part of their [response](#) to the whole review of the public service broadcasting sector. Channel 4 fears that it will lose money as its spectrum subsidy effectively ends with the analogue switch-off in 2012. So it has to come up with new ways of justifying its place in the modern media landscape. [This](#) is how they describe it:

"a new investment fund for innovation – as part of our [Next on 4](#) commitments. Over the next couple of years we will be investing up to £50M in content and services which will help Channel 4 deliver its [public purposes](#) on new platforms, in new ways, for an audience that has new expectations."

So everyone from documentary makers to comedians to social enterprises or charities will be able to make a case.

It is reminiscent of the [creative chaos](#) from which Channel 4 emerged 25 years ago. Channel 4 is a unique hybrid of commercial and public service broadcaster. It commissions all its programmes, although some independent companies are virtually on staff contracts. It has a brief to be different and to experiment in a way that the BBC is not able to do.

So I think that puts in a very good position to lead the way in creating a form of Networked Broadcasting along the lines of my idea of [Networked Journalism](#). It taps into the ideas of [Charlie Leadbeater](#) for example, who will also be at the [2together8](#) conference where all this will be discussed.

At the moment it all sounds rather vague. The danger is that the same old companies will mop up the money. In the end the money is a relatively small figure when spread out over the years.

But I remember how much stick Channel 4 got at its [launch](#). Much of the programming was dreadful. The organisation nearly died from managerial incompetence. But few can deny it has gone on to claim a special place in UK culture. [4IP](#) is in danger of being a token gesture but it has the potential to have the same significant effect.

You can join the debate and pitch your ideas to 4IP via the [2gether08](#) conference.

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