

Riffing off Rapper's Delight

[Martin Cloake](#)

*I said a hip, hop, the hippie, the hippie
To the hip hip-hop, and you don't stop
The rock it to the bang-bang, boogie say "up jump"
The boogie to the rhythm of the boogie, the beat*

Multimedia storytelling was one of the many media buzz phrases that, well, buzzed loudly a few years ago as the industry got to grips with changing technologies and the effects of greater access to new technologies. As is often the case, liberal use of the phrase diverted attention from the simple, but vital, task of illustrating what it meant.

One of the things I did as a freelancer was teach at the London College of Communication and I ran a session looking at good examples of multimedia storytelling. This was not only one of my favourite examples, it enabled us all to have a bit of fun. Never forget we are here to entertain as well as inform.

[I invited BBC journalist Alexis Akwagyiram in to talk about the piece he'd put together to mark the 30th anniversary of the seminal hip-hop track Rapper's Delight hitting the US charts.](#)

(readers of a certain age will be realising painfully that it's now 36 years). The tune was the first mainstream rap song

to break the charts, and signalled the start of a period in which hip-hop has had a huge influence on global culture.

The piece contradicted what was touted as a basic principle of web journalism – keep it brief. It's over 3,000 words long. Of course, it's more specialist than general, it's a feature rather than news, and there are plenty of entry points and a variety of media. But still, it shows how an extended and in-depth piece of journalism can work.

It's full of nice little touches, such as a little box out showing how the language of hip-hop has made it into the mainstream. It featured a Conservative MP (Tony Baldry) discussing allotments and growing fruit and vegetable – about as far away from “the street” and hip-hop culture as you can get. But Baldry talked about it being a “great way to chill out” and, as Alexis then showed, to chill out is a verb the *Oxford English Dictionary* attributes to “S. Robinson et al. Rapper's Delight (song)”.

Another, sadly removed from the truncated version of the story that remains on the BBC site, was an interactive map that encouraged readers to click on tags in various parts of the globe to listen to local interpretations of hip-hop. That illustrated one of the great advantages of web journalism – being able to play the music you were writing about – and turned the reader experience from passive to active.

The slideshow features commentary on how hip-hop culture influenced street fashion, and it's worth watching for

an example of how to make an entertaining piece on a high-profile subject when the budget doesn't let you buy all the images you might want. The use of a little lateral thinking in the picture selection department is also evident.

[One of my favourite parts of the feature is this short film in which photographer Joe Conzo takes us around the neighbourhood where the scene started and tells how he came to be involved.](#) It's full of really nice little touches, such as Joe wearing his NYFD uniform, a marvellous still of a 14-year-old Joe with his camera, and some great images of the early flyers that advertised the events Joe's high school buddies asked him to photograph.

Again, it shows the value of a little extra thought. Instead of just showing Joe's pictures, Alexis has asked Joe to tell his own story, and illustrated the tour not only with footage but also photos and original material that puts across some of the flavour of the times. The soundtrack is pretty good too.

The four tab set-up also provides a clear illustration of the non-linear nature of web storytelling; this feature can be entered at any point and it still works.

Take some time to enjoy the whole piece. And think on this too. Alexis reckoned it took him 80 hours to do the whole thing – research, interviews, processing. That could be seen as a waste of time and resources. I prefer to see it as proof of the quality that can be achieved if you are prepared to devote time and resources to something.