

Module 4 – Case Studies

Introduction

The European Parliament and European Commission have implemented a preparatory action within the scheme **Circulation of European Films in the Digital Era**. They launched three projects: **EDAD** coordinated by Curzon Film World, **Speed Bunch** by Wild Bunch and **TIDE** coordinated by the ARP (Société des Auteurs-Réalisateurs-Producteurs). The players on board were 1) sales agents, 2) release team, 3) coordinator, 4) marketing agency, 5) aggregator for VOD rights, 6) EUROPA distribution, 7) reporting and presentation agency. The following case study will include only the TIDE experiment, the only one to have been fully finalized and to have published all the results.

Case Study 1: TIDE Experiment coordinated by the ARP (Société des Auteurs-Réalisateurs-Producteurs/France)

Release Strategy

- Four (4) films were released *day-and-date* in five different territories in Europe.
- The sales agents proposed a number of films, and the distributors chose one film per sales agent.
- Each film was taken care of by a release team consisting of five distributors (one from each country), one sales agent and members of the TIDE Experiment team.
- The release team defined the common marketing & distribution strategy, calendar and budget.
- The local distributor holds the local VOD and theatrical rights for three years.
- There were no MGs, and 100% of the P&A costs were covered by the TIDE Experiment.
- Sales agents recouped from the first Euro.
- Transversal marketing was an important part of the strategy. The marketing team created word-of-mouth, with the intention of making releases in one country influence releases in other countries.

Challenges

- The four selected films were not attractive to a wide audience. Two of them were documentaries, which does not represent the regular consumption in cinemas or on VOD:
 - “The Spirit of 45” was a documentary by Ken Loach. The director was a good selling point, but he already had two films in cinemas that year, so his audience was mostly attracted to those films.
 - “For Those in Peril” had a nice poster and website, but nobody cared about that film even though it did win prizes at the festivals.
- The posters were not original.
- The trailer for the documentary “Viramundo” lasted 7 minutes, which is too long.
- The choice of films implied high risk. Distributors did have much more attractive movies to submit to the project, but they failed to do so. Sales agents bought the films submitted at little cost, using them just to experiment without having any broader context in mind. Furthermore, they thought only in terms of national releases, which hindered transversality in marketing and international releases.

Conclusions and results

- The entire preparatory action had a budget of 2 million Euros spent on P&A and marketing costs.
- The release strategy was wrong because most of the viewers saw the films on TV and DVD, both of which were almost inexistent as release windows in the strategy.
- There were in total 39 day-and-date releases.
- Among those, there were four films whose screenings were attended by only 27 or fewer people.
- Admissions for all nine films came to only 15,000 admissions.
- The final results demonstrated that sometimes VOD could generate a very good additional audience, but other times not at all. However, none of the numbers were impressive.
- The TIDE team had a good strategy and good players on board, but the films were simply inappropriate. The poor results discouraged exhibitors from continuing with day-and-date.

Case Study 2: “A Field in England” by Ben Wheatley (UK)

Introduction

- This was the first feature to be developed and fully financed through the scheme Film4’s innovation hub Film4.0.
- It is also one of the first films to receive funding from the BFI’s distribution fund New Model Strand, which supports experimental release models; and the film itself was experimental.
- The film budget came to 300,000 British Pounds, which covered the entire production and promotion costs.
- The entire funding came from Film4, the producer and BFI.
- The film was described as an unconventional mixture of narrative, setting, theme and genre. It was shot entirely in black & white, with a small cast, and within twelve days.

Release strategy

Day and date

- The film was released simultaneously through cinemas, DVD/Blu-ray, VOD and TV.
- The choice of partners was interesting: Film4 TV channel, together with a very popular (enjoying a large and loyal fan base) cinema network in Great Britain that also organized events for the opening weekend.
- 77% of the cinema audience knew that the film was being broadcast simultaneously on TV. They went to the cinema anyway, because they wanted to experience the accompanying event.

Additional content

The DVD contained additional content. Extra content on VOD was also provided in the form of an exclusive master class, which for many people was more important than the film itself. The core fan base tended to watch the film online to see the master class, and then go to the cinema to see the film.

Director's involvement

- The film is unconventional, but the director is popular and belongs to a new generation directors using social media:
 - He has made several very successful films in niche markets.
 - He has a loyal fan base and a lot of followers on social media. There has been hype around him in Britain. He was twitting about “A Field of England” non-stop and giving interviews everywhere.
 - When the film was screened at Karlovy Vary in the official competition, the director was present at the festival, and in every single interview he talked about the day and date release of his film.
 - His social media skills make him also a producer, his own distributor of sorts and a marketing agent.
 - His example shows that **digital natives** will be able to make and distribute their films by themselves, creating their film with the release in mind.

Results and conclusions

- Although “A Field of England” is a niche film with a very limited audience, the **choice** of the film for the described strategy proved to be clever:
 - On the opening weekend the film was shown on 17 cinema screens in 17 towns, scored around 2000 admissions (21,000 Pounds), had 360,000 viewers on TV, was viewed 1000 times on VOD and sold on 1500 DVD/Blueray copies.
 - Traditional distributors would have considered this film extremely difficult and would not even have thought of standard distribution. However, the film eventually managed to attract mainstream media coverage and create a storm on the social media.

Case Study 3 – “Welcome to New York” distributed by Wild Bunch

Release strategy

- Wild Bunch decided to release this film during the Cannes Festival in 2014.
- They invested 1 million Euros in marketing and created a story around the film. A lot of money was spent on multiple VOD platforms.
- As a result, they got 140,000 views in 12 days and recouped the marketing costs.
- They were selling tickets for 7 Euros, breaking the market rules. After twelve days, there was no longer any interest in the film because the reviews were bad.
- Wild Bunch sold the film in such a way that if you bought it, you could show it only on the available VOD platforms and have exclusive DVD rights.
- The film was pre-sold to many territories due to the Cannes market context and a huge marketing campaign that created a pre-buzz. Although the content was eventually unsatisfactory, the leaders and explorers went for it to be able to talk about it.
- Digital natives and immigrants went on VOD because no alternative cinema opportunities existed. Therefore, the release campaign targeted and successfully reached multiple digital profiles.