

Time for Quality Film to Go Global

Quality film is at last stepping into the limelight. Online distribution is the key that will enable you and me to watch the films we enjoy – when and how we want. The Future is On Demand.

Film consumption and production are both at an all-time high, while advancements in digital media technology are opening up new distribution opportunities for the film industry. The dynamic nature of film and communications as socio political forces has made them central tools within the context of cultural politics as means of shaping national identity. A close scrutiny and understanding of the changes regarding conditions of distribution within the film industry is in light of this essential.

As the audience grows, so do the demands for high-quality film. Audiences' increased knowledge of the vocabulary of the cinematic language also means that they are becoming more proficient at searching out films catering to their individual tastes. Do increased production, distribution and consumption necessarily mean better films? While it's difficult to give a clear-cut answer, an increase in output should surely mean a greater variety of high-quality films.

Let us for a moment hypothesise that the growth in output is matched by a rise in quality. Then why are the repertoires of cinemas in European capitals marked by such homogeneity? The supremacy of Hollywood cinema is unquestionable; at best local national cinema gets the occasional slot. It is a well-known fact that the percentage of national produced features of European Union countries gaining distribution outside the European borders is as low as 10 %. The corresponding figure for American produced cinema is 90 %. A quick glance at the repertoires of Stockholm's cinemas reveals that out of 33 films, 19 are American titles.

Even though the foothold of quality films on the theatrical circuit is at best capricious, it is encouragingly enough gaining ground through alternative avenues of distribution. Indie cinema has for many years dominated the Academy Awards, while film festivals are multiplying at a remarkable rate and TV-channels exclusively dedicated to quality films, such as Sundance Channel in the USA and Silver in Northern Europe, are gaining popularity.

In today's differentiated digital media landscape the audience is faced with a plethora of choices regarding spectatorship. Opportunities for quality films with a low commercial potential to reach a wide audience should consequently be greater than ever.

One avenue in which to increase accessibility is to cut links in the chain of distribution. The creation of regional or global On Demand services could very well offer a way to radically revolutionise the conditions of distribution. Content aggregators are a reality offering producers the potential to make films instantly accessible to millions of cineastes. The only thing standing in the way of this evolution on a large scale is traditional thinking and a reliance on established industry networks.

Examples of already existing platforms for online distribution are plentiful on both sides of the Atlantic. Through its film service, iTunes could very well change the rules of the film industry globally just as it has already done to those of the music industry. In France the distribution and production company Celluloid Dreams recently launched The Auteurs www.theauteurs.com to great success, while Swedish Voddler has an international agenda and was launched with the aim of becoming the Spotify of film. Continuing to break new digital ground Academy Award winner Steven Soderbergh premiered his latest film "The Girlfriend Experience" online prior to its limited theatrical release this year, proving that digital distribution is starting to gain a foothold even in Hollywood.

On Demand services have also become part of the world of film festivals. As the first festival in the world to do so the Stockholm International Film Festival launched Festival on Demand, and this year the initiative is expanded in collaboration with Telia, Scandinavia's leading Tele Communications Company. Ten films from the festival program will get their Nordic premiere through Telia Digital-tv on the first day of the festival, giving Swedes across the country access to some of the festival's finest films.

<http://www.stockholmfilmfestival.se/en/teliafilmaward>

The project was conceived as a way to support the distribution of quality film in Sweden.

Through new technology the media landscape is opening up and a whole new set of prerequisites for the digital living room are forming – where we can easily watch the films we want unhindered by the barriers put in place by earlier systems of distribution. For once those chiefly set to benefit are small production companies, and countries lacking a major film industry. They now have the opportunity to become pioneers of the new digital frontier. Internet based distribution provide the key to unlocking the potential for national cinema to reach the audience we know is out there searching for great films beyond the multiplex-theatres. The world of online-distribution is full of acronyms – VOD, TVOD, SVOD, DTO, EST, AVOD – but don't avoid them. They will guide you to your favourite films in the future.

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Her viewpoints are personal and should not be taken to be the viewpoints of the Film Festival.

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