



Challenging Distribution 2020 – report
EFM Horizon with Next Wave, DFFB
Tuesday, 25 February 2020 2.00 - 3.00 pm

Executive Summary

The challenges of the digital distribution start with and revolve around the audience. It is also the audience that should stay in our focus while tackling the various VOD challenges. Getting to know the audience, the new ways in which they consume film and media should never cease to be a learning process for everyone working with film. Learning patterns of audience behavior is enabled by the use of technology that we possess already, but should not make us equate the audience with a transaction. Human factor and human emotionality are what can distinguish small and medium VOD platforms from the major American streaming services. Although the big platforms own a lot of data that they continuously collect, the other players can and should focus on the trust and personal feeling that they can develop in their audience towards the platform. This trust can come, for example, from curatorship of the platform that would ensure the subscribers to watch the films they would otherwise have not known or looked for.

Another way of tackling the distribution challenges should be the collaborative model of the players that might have traditionally seen themselves as competitors, such as cinemas and VOD platforms. Indeed the idea of organizing public screenings of various films has been repeatedly mentioned at most of the roundtables as an effective tool of engaging and building the audience.

Introduction

Workshop Challenging Distribution 2020 revolved around the question on how the contemporary VOD platforms can use technology and not forget about the human side of their audiences. The emotional aspect of the audience's use of media has become the main focus of the most of discussions around four different tables.

Challenge Owners

Workshop's structure involved a roundtable discussion with four Challenge Owners that come from the Video on Demand business together with four moderators placed at each table. The common ground for all the challenges has turned out to be audience-related and involves acquiring new audience, audience retention and engagement.

The four challenges stated by the Challenge Owners are:

1. Ways of reaching new subscribers and keeping the non-cinephile audience engaged by defeating the so-called Home Page Syndrome at the same time.
2. Ways of retaining the subscribers and branding their catalogue experience independently from the mother-film festival platform.
3. Ways of branding the platform, so that the audience trusts its curatorship instead of just following the recency model based heavily on the existing FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) paradigm.
4. Ways of engaging the audience and promoting a constellation of niche films that are user-generated rather than part of the marketing campaigns.

Attendees

The workshops succeeded in attracting film industry professionals from wide range of fields beginning with the film producers, media groups, sales agents, VOD platforms, film festivals and finishing with press professionals and academics. The multidisciplinary teams at the roundtables were able to share their experiences from across the value chain, as well as their impressions as audiences themselves.

Conclusion and recommendations

Each of the Challenge Owners that presented their challenges ended the workshop with the ideas that resulted from the brainstorming session of the present film and media professionals.

1. Ways of reaching new subscribers and keeping the non-cinephile audience engaged by defeating the so-called Home Page Syndrome at the same time.

The suggestions are connected with the development of new tools that would differentiate the platform from others and at the same time be a consensus between a static homepage and a noisy platform, where subscribers cannot find the content they are looking for easily.

Possibility to partner up with exhibitors has also been highlighted that could open the chance to meet the subscribers physically during film festivals and film-oriented events.

Interaction with subscribers seems to be the key to the creation of the personal feeling between the platform and its audience. Addressing subscribers' suggestions and holding a real conversation with them build trust and feeling of community.

Technology of recording preferences into the new profiles will not only improve the recommendations system, but also reduce the number of clicks before the subscriber finds the content they want to watch.

Creating urgency to watch the content available on the platform is another way of engaging the subscribers.

2. Ways of retaining the subscribers and branding their catalogue experience independently from the mother-film festival platform.

It is necessary to collect information about the patterns of audience behavior on the particular VOD platform. The mere knowledge of the way how people come to the platform is not enough to be able to address their particular needs. In this case the insight into the subscribers' behavior patterns turns out to be crucial.

Use of social media in promoting the platform and engaging the audience is nowadays not enough and needs to be complemented with other marketing strategies. Gamification project or inviting guest curators, not necessarily from the film industry, could give the answer to the question of reaching to the younger audiences. This would also involve allowing audiences to build their own profiles, share their film lists and chat within the platform.

Interesting strategy could be enabling the young subscribers to give access to one film per year for free acting as platform ambassadors.

The idea of rebranding the VOD platform has been risen, as the platform is now impossible to distinguish from the mother company. This would help to communicate to the audience that the library of the platform is much bigger than just the films screened during the festival.

Future-aimed idea would be reducing the pricing that could be feasible with growing platform to reduce the financial barrier, as well as opening up for the neighboring markets.

3. Ways of branding the platform, so that the audience trusts its curatorship instead of just following the recency model based heavily on the existing FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) paradigm.

The ideas suggested underlined the strength of an individual and human approach towards the audience. Creating competitive streak between subscribers for bringing in more subscribers and increasing the numbers of films watched has been suggested on the basis of similar auction based behavior observed during some pitching events. Competitiveness can bring a feeling of game and challenge to the audience that can also help to fulfill the need of being recognized as a cinephile.

Brand building for a platform and each of the films that are curated could be achieved by the means of user-generated content such as memes, fan art or even a subtitling competition. Personal side of the experience with the platform has been proven to be the most valued among small and medium VOD platforms.

Another way of engaging the public would be to organize public screenings by the subscribers themselves.

Engaging local communities around the existing film clubs, film institutions or film schools would be a way of reaching to the groups that might not have been explored by a digital platform yet.

As a way of tackling the problem of reenergizing older film titles the Directors Invite has been suggested. Directors of films available on the platform could be asked to create content to engage with subscribers, once the film is no longer popular.

4. Ways of engaging the audience and promoting a constellation of niche films that are user-generated rather than part of the marketing campaigns.

The idea of closer branding of the VOD platform and the mother-film festival has been suggested in order to translate the international success of one to the other. The brand of the festival has achieved the success of having the audience that is willing to go blindly into the festival screening that should be replicated for the streaming platform.

The use of the subscribers' data in order to provide better curated content has been highlighted. It could also open up the possibility of right partnerships and collaborations with other festivals and platforms.

The possibility of relating content with current events that would be whether serious or funny, could help to engage the audience in the VOD experience.

