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Factual goals

The sports documentary series has returned to the big leagues, as SVOD services order shows that their algorithms demand, thematic pay channels commission content for the engaged audiences and the 2018 FIFA World Cup rolls around this summer in Russia. Andy Fry reports from the sidelines

From NFL Superbowl to the English Premier League via Formula One motor racing, live sport has always been a fundamental part of the free and pay TV ecosystem. By comparison, sports-based factual programming is a specialist

niche. However, there are key scenarios where it comes into its own.

One is the run up to major events like the 2018 FIFA World Cup, where sports-themed content can either generate excitement in advance of the event, act as a kind of programming glue between live match

transmissions or – in some cases – provide sports content to networks that don't have access to live rights.

In April, for example, HBO Latin America and HBO Europe will air their first ever original coproduction, *Destino Rusia 2018*, a ten-part factual series that will provide “a unique,



22 Media International/Coalhanger Films

will comprise 40 hours of content, backed by various social media activations.

A+E Networks International's executive managing director, Patrick Vien, says the decision to throw so much weight behind this project "came from a recognition that, in 2018, everything in the world of content and TV needs to be event-driven and very immersive, so we went looking for an idea that could merit occupying a big amount of real estate, which is how we came to the World Cup".

"The World Cup is a moment in time when people all over the world get very passionate and hyper-connected about the same thing, so it's a great opportunity for History as a storyteller reaching out to 200 territories," he adds.

Vien calls the project "the biggest international programming initiative History has undertaken" and says it will cover a "multiplicity of perspectives". Anchoring the event will be global documentaries including History's *Greatest Moments in Football*, *Football's Greatest: Head to Head* and *Football Godfathers*, which comes from Zig Zag Productions, and will give insights into the minds and strategies of the world's greatest club managers.

There will also be localised programming in markets like the UK, Germany, Italy and Japan, where there will be an original special, *The History of Japanese Football*, while Latin America will air a biography of superstar player Lionel Messi. Among a slate of short form series will be *The Referee*, about an FA-qualified female ethnic Muslim official in the UK.

Outside this kind of event-based activity, sports documentaries have typically been used as shoulder content on sports channels, the most celebrated example being ESPN's *30 for 30*, which has been running since 2009.

A compelling showcase for sports-based storytelling, *30 for 30* has covered everything from Olympic scandals to mafia infiltration of college sports, via a history of the Harlem Globetrotters, the flamboyant world of professional wrestling and the infamous ice hockey show-down between the Russians and Americans at the 1980 Winter Olympics.

More recently, BT Sport in the UK has followed a similar strategy, producing films about the world of referees, the Bradford City fire and the 'Crazy Gang' of Wimbledon. In early 2018, it aired a documentary about the pressures and rewards of making it as a professional footballer, based on Michael Calvin's book *No Hunger in Paradise*.

compelling and intimate look at football and the World Cup," says Roberto Ríos, HBO Latin America's corporate VP of original production. Spanning twelve countries, the 10x30mins series will present close-up accounts of leading players and their entourage. It follows previous HBO Lat Am projects *Destino South Africa* and

Destino Brazil, which were aired prior to the previous two World Cups.

Something similar is happening over at A+E Networks International's History channel, which is running a 14-day 24/7 'mega event' called *The History of Football* prior to Russia 2018. Due to air in 160 countries, the event



Netflix

Last Chance U



Sunset & Vine

Mobil 1 the Grid

Just as interesting is the battle between the two for prized access to elite sports clubs. Netflix, for example, recently announced plans for *Juventus FC*, a four-hour docuseries following the on-and off-field stories of the Italian club.

Amazon has forged a similar arrangement with Manchester City in the UK, and has also greenlit *Six Dreams*, a docu-series that will follow six individuals (three players, two coaches and a club president) throughout their 2017-2018 season of Spain's elite La Liga.

Amazon has also enjoyed acclaim for *All Or Nothing*, which first focused on the NFL's Arizona Cardinals, and is now set to go behind the scenes at Man City; plus the 'winningest programme in college football', the Michigan Wolverines; and the New Zealand 'All Blacks' rugby team.

Of course, it's important to note that the sports market doesn't really operate like other genres, because ultimate decisions about access to content or talent typically resides with leagues, clubs, agents and federations, many of which are superbly efficient at extracting value from IP.

The Amazon and Netflix projects make sense as promotional exercises, and sometimes brands gain access to content as part of sponsorships (headphone brand Beats recently created a

Head of BT Sport Simon Green says: "No *Hunger in Paradise* explores the pathways for young players to the top, hearing from those involved at local community centres and youth talent scouts, as well as taking a look at some of the most elite academies."

The big disruption in this area, perhaps not surprisingly, has been an invasion of the sports field by Amazon and Netflix. Partly driven by a desire for event programming that will appeal to male subscribers and partly by the desire to

be viewed as a good future home for live sports rights, the two SVOD giants have backed some high quality productions.

On Netflix, a lot of attention has been paid to productions like *Last Chance U*, which is like a modern day version of Steve James' seminal doc *Hoop Dreams*. Here, the focus is on a group of gifted but troubled young players trying to reach the NFL big time. A third season is coming, though the subject is shifting from the college featured in seasons one and two.



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behind-the-scenes branded content series with Sky Media and boxer Anthony Joshua).

Otherwise, a lot of content sits with agencies like IMG, where it is packaged up and licensed to broadcasters around landmark events or as regular magazine shows such as *Trans World Sport*. There are also long-running brand-supported franchises such as the Sunset & Vine-produced *Gillette World Sport* and *Mobil 1 the Grid* (the latter based on motorsports content).

A good example of how the industry operates was Eurosport's 2017 link up with the Fédération Française de Tennis on *La Decima*, an access documentary about Rafa Nadal's historic achievement of ten French Open wins. It was, says Eurosport senior VP of content, production and events Arnaud Simon, an example of how the channel "continually looks at ways to enhance and complement our coverage of the world's greatest sporting events to help fans get closer to the action".

Aside from the issue of access, Danny Fenton, founder and CEO of UK producer Zig Zag, says another challenge in the sports genre is that a lot of the top current talent are too busy with their day jobs to take part in sports-based shows.

"This is why a lot of the focus in sports-themed factual is on up-and-coming talent or recently retired athletes with recognition and experience," he says.

Fenton's company has made around 200 hours of sports content, including *The Football Show* and *The Next Jamie Vardy*, a series for Sky that went on the hunt for non-league players capable of going professional (just as Leicester City's championship-winning striker Vardy did).

However, producers "often make series with ex-footballers and managers, or use well-known talent in a celebrity context", says Fenton. "Examples would be *Gladiator: Benn v Eubank*: or *Freddie Flintoff Vs the World*. Ex-sports stars have a competitive edge that they never really lose – and that makes for great TV."

Mainstream distributors tend not to prioritise sport, instead jumping on opportunities when the arise. Cineflix Rights, for example, has a Muhammad Ali documentary on its slate, while FremantleMedia International has a Serena Williams programme nestling in its catalogue. FMI was also a partner with Fulwell 73 on *Class of 1992*, a football-themed documentary that it successfully distributed worldwide.

However, one veteran executive who sees opportunities in the sports sector is Peter



Dunits, who will debut his new specialist factual/sports distribution company, 22 Media International, at MIPTV.

"There are openings for sport content, but the challenge is that it often comes to broadcasters in a fragmented way – odd episodes they don't know how to schedule," he says. "My goal is to present them with aggregated, themed and relevant packages of shows that are easy for them to place."

In Cannes, Dunits will be presenting content from Zig Zag, FourFourTwo Films, Spark Media Partners and Goalhanger Films (the latter co-founded by Gary Lineker, which is a big help in getting access to talent). "As a result, we have a mix of long-form and short-form – all with great access and insights," he adds. Titles include Goalhanger's *Keane & Viera: Best of Enemies* and Spark Media's *Iron Men*, a documentary about the final farewell to West Ham United's Boleyn Ground.

It's very noticeable that the sports factual field is dominated by football, which Dunits says "reflects the reality of the marketplace". There are – of course – some exceptions to this: Red Bull Media House, for example, has become a content powerhouse thanks to its activities in motorsports and action sports.

Amid the endless array of action and insight videos that it seeds via its own channels or third party platforms, Red Bull has also had success with TV-style programming like *The Smoke that*

Thunders and *The Dawn Wall*, which was well-received at Amsterdam's IDFA festival.

Motorsports is perhaps the biggest area of activity outside football, with Amazon's line-up including a series following F1 team McLaren Racing and another about the Le Mans endurance race – *Le Mans: Racing is Everything*. At MIPTV, Beyond Distribution will also be launching *Grudge Race*, a format based on a US show that airs on NBC Sports Network.

On the international market, Sarah McCormack, Beyond Distribution's senior VP of acquisitions for the UK, Europe and kids, believes it can play out across a wider range of channels "because it has a kind of *Top Gear* quality about it that appeals across demographics".

One emerging area of activity is eSports, which is making inroads into the traditional sports audience. Keen to ride this wave, Gamingzone Entertainment, Bomanbridge Media and Passion Distribution teamed up late last year to launch eSports reality format *Gamerz*, based on a show that first saw the light of day in the Nordic region on video game platforms including Twitch.

The show offers online gaming talent an opportunity to become eSport professionals. According to Emmanuelle Namiech, CEO of Passion Distribution, "it presents a format which for the first time bridges the worlds of eSports and mainstream reality TV". **TBI**

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Factual Hot Picks



THE SHOW: *Bud Empire*

THE BROADCASTER: History (Canada)

THE PRODUCER: Screen Siren Pictures, HLP Productions

THE DISTRIBUTOR: Kew Media Distribution

THE CONCEPT: Doc series exploring the controversial legal marijuana industry

Filming for *Bud Empire* (fka *Bud Dynasty*) began on the day a '4/20' pro-cannabis event was taking place in Vancouver, Canada. Much like the occasion, the show highlights the passions of the entrepreneurs attempting to make their fortunes from marijuana as it moves towards legalisation.

Originally commissioned for Canada's Corus Entertainment, which operates A+E Networks' History channel in the territory, Kew Media Distribution is now launching it at MIPTV.

"The subject is hugely topical globally, and the characters this project follows and their developing stories ensures that it's very intriguing and highly watchable," says Jonathan Ford, executive VP of sales at Kew's distribution arm.

Kew has followed the work of *Bud Empire* producer Trish Dolman, who Ford says had been identified for her "great taste, talent and prolific storytelling". "Therefore, we knew we could be confident in its quality and international relevance," he adds.

Dolman says her show is "an all-access behind-the-scenes look at the pot business", adding the timing is perfect.

"Canada is set to legalise recreational marijuana in 2018, so green is the new gold. This is history in the making"

The series centres on marijuana impresario Bob Kay in the run up to the switchover to legal distribution. "We literally wanted to watch people making history as marijuana comes out of the shadows of prohibition," says Dolman.



THE SHOW: *The Queen's Green Planet*
THE BROADCASTER: ITV (UK)
THE PRODUCER: ITN Productions
THE DISTRIBUTOR: Cineflix Rights
THE CONCEPT: Doc featuring David Attenborough about Queen Elizabeth II's conservation initiative

The Queen's Green Planet tackles one of the world's great ecological conundrums: protecting the forests of Earth. Specifically, it follows Queen Elizabeth II's initiative to create a new global network of protected forests, which is known as The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

"Content that has a theme that resonates globally will obviously be more in demand than something that feels niche and for a particular geographical audience," says Chris Bonney, CEO of rights at Cineflix Media.

"Films around issues such as conservation or the environment work best with international buyers if they get the message across through entertaining television or fantastic filmmaking."

The doc certainly gets the right access – producer ITN Productions has a long-standing relationship with the British Royal Family, who "continue to provide a fascination for international audiences", says Cineflix's sales chief Bonney.

Further to that is a filmed conversation between the Queen and heralded natural history broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, "who also has global recognition and is such a great ambassador for the environment", says Bonney.

Cineflix is aiming for primetime deals with public broadcasters and commercial channels, and has already secured deals with the ABC in Australia and Kiwi pay TV service Sky.

"Royal-themed documentaries sell well internationally, and traditionally have a long shelf life," says Bonney. "This is particularly the case when the younger royals are featured, in this case Princes William and Harry and Catherine, as well as the Queen.

"Add in a national treasure, David Attenborough, who is one of the most respected broadcasters on the planet, and the multi-award winning, critically acclaimed director Jane Treays, and you have a fantastic programme that is a step above other royal documentaries on the market."

THE SHOW: *Combat Machines*
THE BROADCASTER: History (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Woodcut Media
THE DISTRIBUTOR: TCB Media Rights
THE CONCEPT: Latest chapter in the *Combat* franchise, this time on machines' role in shaping the world



Many broadcasters will already be familiar with History UK's *Combat* series. The 2015 series *Combat Trains* upped its slot average by 161%, while *Combat Ships* doubled its time slot in February 2017, according to Adam Jacobs, executive producer at the franchise's creator, Woodcut Media.

Combat Ships' ratings in France were as good as the local remake of *Top Gear*, while Smithsonian Channel has found it a solid performer. Jacobs says the "appetite for the franchise just keeps growing", and says it can expand even further, while also returning to the existing strands for new seasons.

Combat Machines runs to eight episodes, each of which tells stories of how machines have shaped the world we live in "from every angle", as is the way with most original content on History, says Jacobs.

Distributor TCB Media Rights says the show's MIPDoc launch is simply a response to demand. It will be targeting previous buyers in France, the US, Germany, the Nordic regions and Australia. "The shelf life is strong, so there'll be plenty more after that," says Jacobs. "Premium international factual broadcasters have shown an increased interest recently in history content," he adds.

"As a genre, its popularity has picked up both in the UK and abroad. This is due to a renewed appetite for known historical stories, told well, featuring high production values, new revelations and personal testimony, but at a very cost effective price point."



THE SHOW: *The Hitler Chronicles – Blueprint for Dictators*
THE PRODUCER: Epoche Media Production
THE DISTRIBUTOR: First Hand Films
THE CONCEPT: Doc attempting to shine light on the motivations of German dictator Adolf Hitler

It takes a brave filmmaker to create a documentary attempting to understand the motivations that drove German dictator Adolf Hitler in the lead up and during his time in power. However, that's exactly what Hermann Pölking-Eiken has done with *The Hitler Chronicles* and what First Hand Films will be selling at MIPDoc.

"The filmmakers have shown a way to dive into a period and witness it," says First Hand CEO Esther van Messel.

"While watching *The Hitler Chronicles*, you can't help but associate with other names, other periods and other dictators grappling for power with such very similar means. History doesn't repeat itself, but knowing

where we come from might help us to see where we're going."

The doc was first produced for cinema and clocked in at more than seven hours long. A shorter, three hours-plus version was then produced for festivals before these two distinct formats were reversioned into TV series, one a 13x50mins series and the other at four commercial hours. This means there's plenty of variation available to buyers.

Specialty channels and mainstream networks are already attached – SRC in French-speaking Canada and History in Australia both pre-bought the longer-form series, while a Polish net has taken on the 4x50mins series.

The Hitler Chronicles comprises more than 900 archive films, many in colour, with more than 40% of the footage never seen before and all of which is rendered in HD. It also uses quotes from more than 100 actors, and van Messel says all sounds have been "most carefully dubbed".

"In 20 years of existence, First Hand has never before handled a documentary on Hitler, but this one is different," says van Messel. "It embeds the audience in the period, it looks at events without hindsight interpretation, and it makes clear that dictatorships building themselves on democratic grounds before smothering these do so distinctly and visibly."

THE SHOW: *Working with Weinstein*
THE BROADCASTER: Channel 4 (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Tigerlilly Productions
THE DISTRIBUTOR: Orange Smarty
THE CONCEPT: Former colleagues recall working with disgraced Hollywood producer

Due to Harvey Weinstein's influence, many of the highest profile stories of his sexual behaviour have focused on female actors and well known celebrities. However, those that worked with him also experienced his alleged actions, as this new 1x49mins doc from UK indie Tigerlilly Productions sets out to show.

The programme focuses on the producer's impact on the film industry over 30 years, and how he used his position to silence colleagues from talking out. It includes in-depth interviews with everyone from former assistants to Oscar-winning UK producers to build a picture of

power, wealth and influence. "This documentary builds up a picture of how Weinstein came to dominate the British film industry," says Karen Young, founder of distributor Orange Smarty.

"It specifically doesn't tell the stories of the actresses who were abused by him, but focuses on the men and women that worked with him and the abuse they had to put up with; day in, day out"

There has been no shortage of docs about Weinstein since allegations over his actions came to light last year, but Natasha Dack Ojumu and Nikki Parrott from Tigerlilly had connections to the worlds he moved in, meaning access was easier to achieve. This was part of the reason UK broadcaster Channel 4 commissioned it.

"We all know the films that Weinstein was involved in – worldwide hits such as *Shakespeare in Love*, *The Crying Game*, *My Week with Marilyn* are part of our cultural life – so it's important for us now to understand the context in which they were being made," says Young.



THE SHOW: *The Year of the Tribe – In Search of the Real Korowai*
THE BROADCASTER: BBC Two (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Keo Films
THE DISTRIBUTOR: Hat Trick International
THE CONCEPT: Adventurer Will Millard meets an Indonesian jungle community discovered only 40 years ago

BBC Two's three-hour doc series follows writer and adventurer Will Millard's extraordinary encounters with the Korowai, an isolated tribe in West Papua, a tropical jungle province of Indonesia. The explorer visits the community's people four times over the course of a year, uncovering how their hunter-gatherer traditions still exist.

"Part of the point of making the series was to film everything that happens on expeditions like these, and not to set things up in advance with fixers or recce," says Will Anderson, producer and director of the programme.

"Will Millard took the lead and made the decisions on the ground, and the film crew followed him. People he met along the way



gave him various tip-offs about various different Korowai communities, and he followed his instincts, but things didn't go to plan. The film Will ended up making was very different from what he'd envisaged."

Audiences see Millard, who speaks fluent Indonesian, but no Korowai, embed himself within the remote tribe and attempt to live their lifestyle. This includes going hungry

when the rains come, as the hunters cannot go out and find food.

Anderson says the series "probably" works best for public service broadcasters like the BBC, "although the drama is strong and the insights are revelatory, so any channel could be interested".

Hat Trick International will be shopping worldwide rights in Cannes.

While Lauren Marriott, VP of international programmes sales at Viacom, calls two-part doc *Concorde* an exploration of the "fascinating science behind the most ever developed aircraft", she adds it is "also a celebration of the golden age of travel".

The show charts the history of the supersonic, high-cost passenger aircraft, with

David Suchet (*Poirot*) narrating. The story looks at the design and manufacture through to its eventual retirement in October 2003.

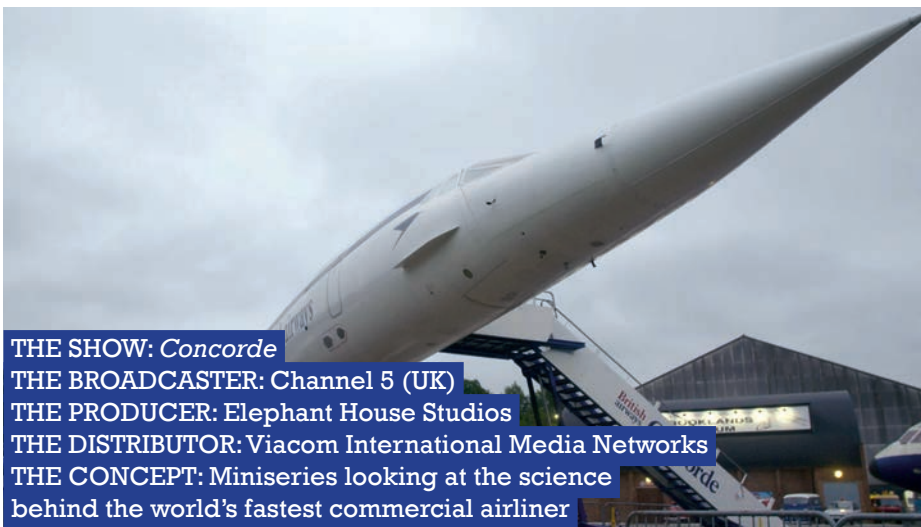
Viacom International Media Networks (VIMN) executive Marriott adds that aeronautical programming attracts broad audience. "Travel has become an expansive category that appeals to a very broad

audience, and also a topic for which there are many points of entry," she says. "People young and old are more curious than ever about the world in which they live."

Concorde first went out on Viacom's UK terrestrial net, Channel 5, and comes from the broadcaster's production wing, Elephant House Studios. The fact VIMN commissioned, broadcasted and sells the show highlights why Viacom paid £450 million (US\$625 million) for the network back in 2014.

The show averaged an audience of 1.3 million viewers in December last year. This was 26% up in terms of volume and 15% higher than the same slot in 2016, says Marriott. Overall, it reached 3.2 million across the two episodes, and drew in good numbers of ABC1 males – more than BBC Two's *Employable Me* and Channel 4's *999 – What's Your Emergency?*

"The show could appeal to many types of channels, including public broadcasters; specialty cable channels with a focus on science, engineering or travel; or free-to-air channels looking for a co-viewing programming opportunity," says Marriott.



THE SHOW: *Concorde*
THE BROADCASTER: Channel 5 (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Elephant House Studios
THE DISTRIBUTOR: Viacom International Media Networks
THE CONCEPT: Miniseries looking at the science behind the world's fastest commercial airliner



THE SHOW: *Surgeons at the Edge of Life*
THE BROADCASTER: BBC Two (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Dragonfly Film and Television
THE DISTRIBUTOR: Endemol Shine International
THE CONCEPT: Fixed-rig doc highlighting the working lives of surgeons

This BBC Two doc series focuses on pioneering operations that until recent breakthroughs were deemed impossible, says *Surgeons at the Edge of Life* executive producer Richard Bond.

"The stories chosen all had an element that was risky, difficult or used a surprising new technique; and they were all 'high

stakes' procedures where the outcome was either life saving or life changing for the patient," she says.

Series producer Dragonfly captured the footage at the surgical unit of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham through fixed-rig cameras, which meant the doctors could work in peace and let their real

personalities show through, says Bond. Also employed were head cams mounted on key surgical team members, and microscopic camera feeds, and graphics that locate the action and the science behind procedures.

"As a result we managed to capture truthfully the highs and lows of each operation, revealing how surgeons really behave when things go wrong, and the camaraderie and unexpected humour that emerges while they work under extreme pressure," says Bond.

Interspersed are candid 'down the lens' interviews with the surgeons in which they talk about the pressure of the operations and their relationships in the hospital.

Bond says the show is "an innovative hybrid that combines the procedural insight of specialist factual with the human heart of a documentary series".

He adds: "Surgery is performed everywhere and has a universal appeal. As the series says at the start of every episode: 'Most of us will have an operation in our lifetime, but few know what really happens once we're put to sleep'."

British celebrity chef James Martin has seen his international profile significantly expand through *James Martin's French Adventure*, in which he retraced the steps of legendary predecessor and culinary hero Keith Floyd in the late 20th Century. His new show takes the same road trip format in the US.

"Many of the *French Adventure* buyers are already committed to take the *American Adventure*, and we expect to break into new markets as we meet with our North American buyers in Cannes," says Nicky Davies Williams, CEO of distributor DCD Rights. "We have already announced sales to Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Poland, and Central and Northern Europe."

With the series running to 20 episodes, buyers can expect plenty of bang for their buck, and Martin, known for presenting British cookery shows such as *Saturday Kitchen* and *James Martin's Saturday Morning*, has been on hand to help out from a marketing standpoint.

"Increase in volume delivers a strong base of programming to allow broadcasters and digital platforms to promote the series and talent in their markets," says Davies Williams. "James has already been very supportive of our promotional efforts at DCD."



THE SHOW: *James Martin's American Adventure*
THE BROADCASTER: ITV (UK)
THE PRODUCER: Blue Marlin Television
THE DISTRIBUTOR: DCD Rights
THE CONCEPT: UK celebrity chef goes on a culinary roadtrip on the US

The exec adds that the culinary travelogue genre has "proved to be one of the strongest formats" in the DCD catalogue: "It combines a perfect discovery for the senses in taste and adventure. What we have also found is that a great enthusiast and personality such as James Martin is a compelling combination."

Standout moments from the season include Martin riding through the Napa Valley in California, which Davies Williams describes as "a moment of warmth and freedom", plus a Mexican food tasting session in San Antonio. "My favourite highlight was James having a surfing lesson in Santa Cruz," she adds. **TBI**



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Adapting audio

A string of networks from HBO to Amazon have adapted podcasts for the small screen, with many more set to come. Kaltrina Bylykbashi speaks to television producers and pod creators on what makes the platform so compelling

Since *Serial* launched in 2014, showing the potential of podcasts to engage mass audiences, there has been a flurry of popular shows emerging through the medium, and now they're coming for the small screen.

From *Lore*, which was recently picked up for a second season on Amazon, to *Pod Save America*, which was brought in by HBO, to *The Bright Sessions* and *Homecoming*, the television business has seen programmes from a range of genres – almost all unscripted – picked up by various networks and services.

Propagate's head of development and vice president B.P. Jenkins is a self-confessed "passionate consumer of podcasts". He has found a string of true-crime podcasts to take to TV through the company, including *Lore*, *Up and Vanished* and *Sword and Scale*.

"The next Steven Spielberg is likely still in high school and he's starting to tell his first stories, not with an iPhone, but through podcasts," he says.

This is because podcasts lend themselves remarkably to screens, according to the exec. Not only has the medium "democratised

storytelling" due to the low-cost, low-risk entry point to content creation, but many of the shows come with a loyal, built-in audience, and hosts who have a good understanding of character development, design and sound. "You get a really rich experience to translate that," says Jenkins.

"Historically, you've never been able to get that from a medium. People running podcasts are creatives – what you're seeing in the podcast industry is that it's being creatively-led. As we've seen historically, there's a burst and boom of great material when industries are like that."

Lore is one of the most successful examples of a podcast heading to TV, particularly because it is one of the only titles to do so that will now go on to a second season. The core to its success is Propagate's close working relationship with its creator Aaron Mahnke, who was near quitting a career as a novelist before finding success on the medium.

"Podcasting is very personal," says Jenkins. "No one listens to a podcast if they can't identify with the people telling the story: *Serial*'s Sarah Koenig is a perfect example."

He adds people were so invested in the story of *Serial*'s subject, prisoner Adnan Syed, and in the voice of attorney Rabia Chaudry, who campaigns for his release, that they went to a spin-off pod, *Undisclosed*. "People feel an affection and loyalty to them that they want to connect with," says Jenkins. "When things are adapted well, that storyteller is connected to the television franchise in some way."

Jenkins also says that Amazon pledged the a large amount of investment in marketing the show, which is another important element.

However, failing to include hosts in the development process is one area where



Welcome to Night Vale co-creators Jeffrey Cranor and Joseph Fink

storytellers, but look at the Duffer Brothers. *Stranger Things* had been around Hollywood for five years before Netflix believed in them and gave them a shot. The same can be said with podcasts. It's a new medium and there's a lot of very hungry talented storytellers out there

to find an audience, and with that came a lot of originality in storytelling."

Cranor is unsure about how *Welcome to Night Vale*'s adaptation, now at pilot stage with FX, will affect the storytelling of his title, but he is optimistic about the future.



networks have been going wrong, according to Jenkins, who says that he's disappointed that TV channels have not taken podcast titles to second seasons, or changed the format.

This highlights that in many ways podcast adaptation is still in its infancy, and it's likely that there will be a huge amount of growth over the next few years across genres.

Jenkins says: "Oddly enough, I still don't think a lot of TV networks understand podcasts. It's because they're not consuming them."

"They're caught up in their own process and they're still slow to open up the door to new

who want to see their adaptations make it to the next level."

Fresh voices such as those of Jeffrey Cranor of *Welcome to Night Vale* or *Sword and Scale*'s Mike Boudet, which Jenkins thinks of as separate from the 'Hollywood machine', are core to the success of the format, and this is what will continue to push the medium forward.

"We all have something unique to say," argues Boudet. "For decades television, film and radio have been a closed system, with limited access for a few key players. Podcasting allowed anyone with a computer, mic and a great idea

"I'm excited that all these podcasters are putting stuff out and finding a different way into the business, and I'm also excited a lot of them are also still podcasting."

"I think about it in the same way that you have Marvel comics and the Marvel cinematic universe. The comics have been around much longer than our podcast has, but it's the idea that they're two separate entities that will crossover. There's a fanbase which will gravitate towards the TV show and, by the same stretch, if our show gets made by FX and they're not familiar with the podcast, there will be an overlap." **TBI**

LAST WORD

STEPHEN MCQUILLAN



Follow the tortoise, not the share

Last month, the BBC's impressive media editor, Amol Rajan, made a passionate speech called 'The Tortoise and the Share' on the future of journalism. In it, he encouraged his industry to reconnect with the roots of the craft, and to follow the slow and steady wisdom of the tortoise rather than the frantic chase for share.

In our own industry, amongst the never-ending battle for TV share, two pieces of news have recently caught my eye as a UK-based factual producer.

Channel 4 announced that it will be doubling the amount of content it commissions from outside London, and SVOD kingpin Netflix announced another increase in its commissioning budget.

Frankly, it feels like a pretty good time to be a regional UK specialist factual provider. However, more than ever it feels like to succeed in this fragmenting market you need to be absolutely certain that you are pitching the right shows to the right broadcasters.

So far, 2018 provides plenty of reasons to be cheerful for non-scripted programme makers. For us at Icon Films, in both the traditional and new platforms, there is a lot to play for this year.

In April, *Jeremy Wade's Mighty Rivers* will launch on Animal Planet after nine seasons of the phenomenal beast that was *River Monsters*,

and later in 2018 we launch *Hunting Evidence*, our first series for the Travel Channel.

With the *Savage Kingdom* franchise continuing to expand at Nat Geo Wild and our fourth season of *Primal Survivor* back in production for National Geographic, our building is buzzing. As ever though, it is in the development department that we are thinking hardest about where the next stage of growth will come from.

Like every other independent company we have been attempting to scale the walls of the SVOD services over the last few years and finally it feels like things are about to move up a gear. We have several healthy developments in with streamers and I know that our colleagues in the industry are similarly optimistic that the new world of OTT commissions is finally close or actually happening.

However, how will we ride the dual horses of SVOD development alongside developing for the multitude of traditional terrestrial broadcasters in non-scripted without getting spread too thinly?

As a company that has always made a lot of content for broadcasters on both sides of the Atlantic, we are very familiar with the split demands of US and UK needs for our development team. What's noticeable is how our development is increasingly pulled towards the sparkly world of SVODs, and our slate of ideas is slowly but surely starting

to split three ways between the UK, US and subscription on-demand.

"I think this would be great for Netflix" is the phrase I hear most often from bright eyed and bushy tailed development APs. Its incredibly liberating, as many of these potential SVOD projects simply wouldn't fit with our terrestrial clients needs or indeed budgets, but with so many potential players in the market now how do you keep your eyes on the prize of a commission?

Plus, how do you properly cost benefit the work you do in development with such a range of players in the market? There's an old joke about TV development that we all know 50% of our development is working and 50% isn't – we just don't know which is which.

Simple as it sounds, for me the key to getting the ideas right is to hunt out the good stories that inevitably come out of brainstorming and to do all you can to make those stories as compelling as you can in your materials. Overthinking the needs of the buyer or agonising over what your USP is to a commissioner can be the death of a good story.

We are currently creating development materials for a lot of new clients and accruing a lot of air miles going round the world pitching them. It's incredibly exciting, but more than ever we need to be focused on what the great stories are and what doesn't stack up as time gets chewed up very quickly by so many potential buyers.

When I heard Amol Rajan's call to arms for journalism to go back to its roots I thought it was entirely transportable to our own industry. It seems that as the number of buyers expands in front of our eyes, maybe we should all remember the wisdom of the tortoise: keep it slow and steady, remember what a good story is, and resist the urge to go haring after sparkly dead ends. **TBI**

We are finally scaling the walls of the SVOD services, but how do we ride the dual horses of streaming and traditional broadcaster development without getting spread too thinly?



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