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Television Business International



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about windowing in 2019

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Golden Year



It would be an understatement to say that 2019 is going to be a big year for media. The upheaval we have glimpsed across production, broadcasting and distribution in the last few years is coming to a head, and by year's end, the landscape will look starkly different, with major consolidated platforms looking to rival Netflix and Amazon, merged entities such as Comcast and Sky expanding eastwards, and new

players from the East expanding westwards.

This issue of TBI gets under the skin of these tectonic shifts, looking back at 2018's watershed moments while unpacking the wider consequences of competition and consolidation in the year ahead. Crucially, we look to separate the fanfare from the facts, with Netflix and WarnerMedia's landmark *Friends* deal presenting a handy prism.

Elsewhere in the issue, we explore the changes to come at Australia's Nine Network following its historic merger with Fairfax Media, and go behind the explosion of Aussie drama on international platforms. Latin America's scripted boom is also in focus, with a revealing look at the industry's fascinating "de-telenovela-ization".

Meanwhile, we mark TBI's debut at the Realscreen Summit by uncovering top unscripted trends to emerge out of the World Congress of Science and Factual Producers, and taking a deep dive into how Netflix is raising the bar for factual programming. There's also a run-down of the hottest shows launching in Miami and New Orleans, and a rallying cry from Insight TWI boss and former Democratic nominee for US Congress Jon Ossoff around the dire need for more funding of public media.

Manori Ravindran

Editor Manori Ravindran • manori.ravindran@knect365.com • @manori_r
Managing editor Kaltrina Bylykbashi • kaltrina.bylykbashi@knect365.com • @bylykbashi
Sales manager Michael Callan • michael.callan@knect365.com
Art director Matthew Humberstone • matthew.humberstone@knect365.com
Marketing manager Abigail Dede • abigail.dede@knect365.com
Commercial director Patricia Arescy • patricia.arescy@knect365.com

Published by Knect365 TMT, Maple House,
149 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 7AD
Tel: +44 (0)20 7017 5000
e-mail: tbi@knect365.com **web:** www.tbivision.com

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A year in review

An action packed 2018 saw TV firms establish new frontiers by defining SVOD plans, finalising acquisitions and hiring top global talent. Here are some of the highlights that outlined our year.

The Crown

NETFLIX REIGNED SUPREME

In 2018 Netflix has reached 137m subscribers and bagged talent from the Obamas to Ryan Murphy and *Sharp Objects* creator Marti Noxon. Despite cynicism over its extraordinary content spend – now expected to be a fair bit over the originally planned \$8bn for the year – its shares rose by as much as 80% up to December.

The streamer's biggest play of the year has been to deepen its international reach by investing in international originals. Spanish original *La Casa de Papel*, Brazil's *3%* and India's *Sacred Games* were repeatedly quoted as some of the most popular titles on the platform from Netflix execs.

This was furthered by the launch of a fully-equipped production hub in Madrid, Spain, and a commissioning base in London, which has since hired execs from Sky's drama chief Anne Mensah to Canal Plus factual head Diego Buñuel.

The company has stated that there will be at least 70 international originals in place for 2019, and 12 of them will be based in India – a key territory for growth.

With 80% of the company's new subscriber growth coming from international audiences, it's no wonder that content chief Ted Sarandos said this area of the business will be a core focus for 2019.

Elsewhere, the streamer tied with HBO for the first time in Emmy wins, ending HBO's 17-year streak as leader. Its most popular titles of the year include *The Crown*, *Black Mirror* and *Godless*. It is also banking on *The Umbrella Academy* and *The Dark Crystal* to become its brand-defining titles of 2019.

While the streamer is looking at some stiff competition in 2019 from new Disney, AT&T and Apple platforms, it's safe to say 2018 was the year of Netflix.

BROADCAST EXECS FLOCKED TO SVOD

Broadcast execs scrambled to top jobs with streaming platforms in 2018 as their influence continues to grow and impact the industry.

One top move included Channing Dungey's shift to Netflix to become VP of original content after 14 years at ABC, including three as entertainment president.

Sky UK's drama head Anne Mensah also left to join the platform in November pointing to a major strategy shift that could see the commissioning power shift in the UK's favour.

Channel 4's former head of factual entertainment Lucy Leveugle joined Mensah in Netflix's London office, where she will focus on unscripted content from across EMEA.

The Netflix London commissioning office opened in June with the hire of Canal Plus exec Buñuel who joined as director of original docs for the division.

Other notable Netflix hires include Alexi Wheeler, who joined the platform in the kids and family content division in EMEA from Nickelodeon, and Ben Cavey who joins Netflix's comedy team from Endemol-owned Tiger Aspect.

Elsewhere, Amazon tapped NBC Entertainment president Jennifer Salke to become head of content to replace Roy Price, who departed amid sexual harassment claims in late 2017.

Apple also looked to broadcasters for staff and hired BBC Films veteran Joe Oppenheimer as a creative executive for its international team – led by former Channel 4 creative boss Jay Hunt.

The tech giant also hired Paramount Network's Dana Tuinier as creative executive for comedy within its Worldwide Video unit.

DISNEY, AT&T & APPLE PREPARED FOR BATTLE

Disney, AT&T and Apple spent most of their year laying out plans for full-service streamers that will take on the dominance of Netflix in 2019.

Perhaps the most anticipated of the lot has been the Disney+ service, due to launch at the end of 2019. Every detail on the platform, whether minor or major, received the full attention of TV execs and shareholders alike.

Throughout 2018, TBI has worked out that the Mouse House will focus on family-friendly content for its Disney+ service, while Hulu will be adult-oriented and populated by the Fox content it is to inherit via its acquisition of the company in 2019.

Disney CEO Bob Iger also revealed during the company's final earnings call of the year that Disney+ will have localised content in its libraries and that all of Disney's 2019 theatrical releases will end up on the platform.

Over at Apple, it was revealed that the platform's first slate of originals – which includes projects from Reese Witherspoon, Steven Spielberg and Damien Chazelle – is set for launch in spring-summer 2019.

While 2017 was the year that Apple named high-profile projects from well-known talent, 2018 saw the tech giant invest more heavily in children's content. In December, it signed an extensive deal with DHX Media for new *Peanuts* content including new shows, specials and short films. Earlier in

the year, the platform also teamed with Sesame Workshop to create a slate of kids' programming.

TBI found in September that Apple has been circling interactive projects pitched at France's Cartoon Forum.

As the streaming battle heats up for the best content, Apple also focused on signing high-profile talent to its platform, bringing in Oprah Winfrey in a multi-year deal to create original programming and *Fast and the Furious* director Justin Lin and his production banner Perfect Storm Entertainment.

Meanwhile, AT&T shuttered the DramaFever and Filmstruck services it inherited from Time Warner after completing its acquisition in June, and set plans for a three-tiered service packed with HBO, Turner and Warner Bros. content.

The streamer's bosses, AT&T chief Randall Stephenson and WarnerMedia CEO John Stankey, have been more forthcoming than their competitors around plans for the platform, revealing that the service will be more expensive than HBO Now, which charges \$14.99 per month. They have also laid out intentions to make the most of existing content within the group, shunning the content "warehouse" style of competitors such as Netflix.



La Casa de Papel

EUROPE: BREXIT & QUOTAS

The UK government's Brexit negotiations have dominated headlines over 2018 as the nation struggles to reach a clear deal with Europe, affecting businesses both in and out of the state.

At the start of the year the Commercial Broadcasters Association (COBA) warned the UK government that Brexit could cost the nation's television market £1bn (US\$1.4bn) per year in investment from international broadcasters. As the UK prime minister Theresa May has progressively failed to reach an overall deal with the EU, COBA has gone on to warn that a 'no-deal' Brexit would have a "disastrous" impact on the UK broadcasting sector.

The UK's culture secretary Jeremy Wright reassured during this year's Edinburgh International TV Festival that UK broadcasters are a "vital" part of Brexit negotiations and that he will support them to retain talent and also work towards keeping the free movement of talent.

This has already been called into question by the UK Screen Alliance, which has said that the UK's post-Brexit immigration plan, which was revealed in December, will damage industry growth and add costs.

Elsewhere, Creative Europe issued advice to UK organisations on how to coordinate existing or upcoming funding programmes in the case of a 'no deal' Brexit. One key aspect of the guidance revealed that the government has provided reassurance that it will underwrite the payments of awards for the UK organisations that have already successfully bid for funding.

A number of international distributors also told TBI on the annual distributor survey that while Brexit has yet to impact business, many of them predict they will do so in the future.

European content quota caps were also hotly debated in the past year, with the European Parliament, European Council and European Commission reaching a final agreement to impose a 30% quota on SVOD services. Since, Netflix has pledged to increase its number of European titles by a third.

Closer to home, Channel 4 revealed Leeds as the base for its national headquarters, alongside creative hubs in Bristol and Glasgow. The long-awaited decision marks the biggest structural change in the organisation's 35-year history and will see a significant increase in C4's nations and regions content spend.



My Brilliant Friend

THE WORLD LOOKED TO CHINA

In 2018 China became the second-largest TV market in the world with TV programming expenditures reaching \$10.9bn and 46% of that figure attributed to international content acquisition. It's not hard to see why every major international TV player is questioning whether to dip their toe into the market.

Many already struck high profile deals in 2018. Fremantle made a pact to take *My Brilliant Friend* to iQiyi; Endemol Shine Group adapted its *Humans* drama format with its China division; and CBS Studios International also took *The Late Late Show* with James Corden to iQiyi.

But despite China's growth, many still remain divided on how to approach the territory. New restrictions set by the Radio and Television Administration in September stated that it would outlaw foreign TV shows in their entirety for prime-time (7-10pm) and place a 30% quota on streaming platforms for any imported content, among other restrictions. It left many confused about how welcome their work is in the territory.

Further controversy struck when China was named Country of Honour at this year's MIPCOM. International format protection group FRAPA particularly took issue with the decision after experiencing numerous IP theft claims by international producers in recent years.

One TV entity that does not look to expand its business in China is Netflix. In December's UBS Media Conference Ted Sarandos said that work with the territory has been, for the most part, a "frustrating distraction".

ACQUISITION FRENZY

If 2017 saw media giants working up to further consolidation, 2018 was the year they finalised them.

Disney finally set in motion its \$71.3bn acquisition of 21st Century Fox assets in July after a months-long bidding battle with Comcast. The merger has been approved by shareholders and the US Justice Department and must now wait to sell off its regional sports networks to complete the merger.

Peter Rice, president of 21st Century Fox, has told staffers that the merger will complete around spring-summer 2019.

As a result of the merger, Comcast set its sights on acquiring a majority stake in Sky, which is shared with 21st Century Fox. After battling it out with Fox, and raising the acquisition price to US\$4.0bn, Comcast closed the deal in October.

Another consequence of the Disney-Fox merger is that Endemol Shine Group, co-owned by 21st Century Fox and Apollo Global Management, was put up for sale for \$4bn in Spring.

BREAKTHROUGH FORMATS

Formats made an impact in 2018 and the UK's *Love Island* led the pack, smashing ITV2 viewing records with 3.5m viewers at premiere alone.

The dating format is also set to appear in local adaptations around the world. CBS has secured a US edition of the reality series which is intended to lead a brand refresh for the network in 2019, while the Australian edition, which aired on Nine Network, gained so much popularity ITV placed it in its UK-based VOD service ITVHub.

Nordic territories Denmark, Norway and Finland are also set for local editions, along with a second series in Germany on RTL2.

Elsewhere, Channel 4 and Studio Lambert format *The Circle* also burst onto the scene late into the year, gaining an overnight audience of 1m on opening night.

The fresh concept, which sees a group of contestants living in separate apartments in a single building communicate entirely on a specially made social media platform, was quickly snapped up by Netflix, which will launch the format in the US, France and Brazil.



The Circle

After a string of high-profile suitors dropped out of the bidding race, including ITV, Fremantle, Banijay Group and RTL, the sale was called off by Fox and Apollo in November.

Meanwhile, AT&T has come a long way from tussling with Trump for the go-ahead on the Time Warner merger. In June, the entertainment company received the go-ahead from a US federal judge for its \$85bn acquisition.

While AT&T has moved quickly to set up plans for a giant streaming platform with the newly renamed WarnerMedia, it will still have to await the results of the US government's appeal of the ruling, due to emerge in the first quarter of 2019.

Australian media giant Nine Entertainment also completed its merger of Fairfax in December, creating a company with a combined market value of \$4.2bn. The move sees the company gain full ownership of Aussie streamer Stan as well as a string of newspapers including *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. **TBI**

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On the move

TBI takes a closer look at the latest comings and goings across the industry

NBC Entertainment promoted **Meredith Ahr**, head of Universal Television Alternative Studios, to president of its alternative and reality group, taking over from Paul Telegdy, who was promoted as co-chairman of NBC Entertainment alongside George Cheeks



Apple's commercial director for international services **Ben King** has been appointed SVP of global distribution and business development for sports streamer DAZN



BBC Studios group chief operating officer and MD of production **Anna Mallett** was named chief executive of *Drug Lords* producer ITN Productions, replacing John Hardie

Mark Shapiro has been promoted to president of Endeavor – the parent company of WWE, UFC and IMG – after heading up the content business at IMG for five years



Electus Television and International president **John Pollak** has moved to NBC's alternative and reality group to head its domestic sales strategy, months after Propagate Content acquired *Running Wild With Bear Grylls* producer-distributor Electus

BBC Studios' documentary unit head **Fiona Campbell** was tapped as the new BBC Three controller, following the exit of Damian Kavanagh, who has joined Endemol's *Peaky Blinders* producer Tiger Aspect as MD



Rüdiger Böss, EVP of content acquisitions and sales at Germany's ProSiebenSat.1 Media SE, has left after 25 years with the business. Henrik Pabst will now oversee content acquisitions and content sales in his new role as chief commercial officer for entertainment

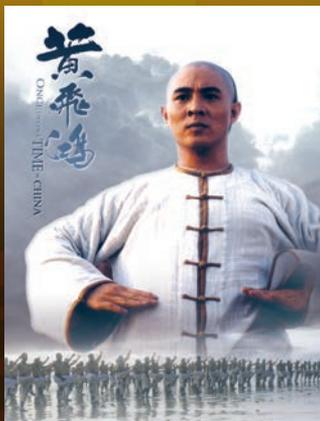
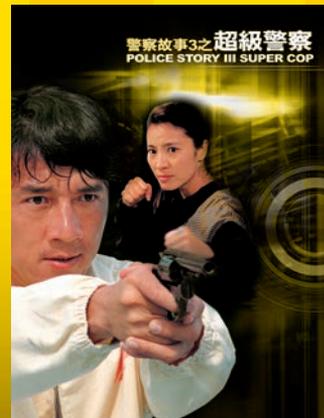
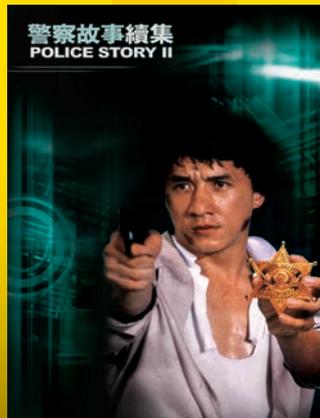
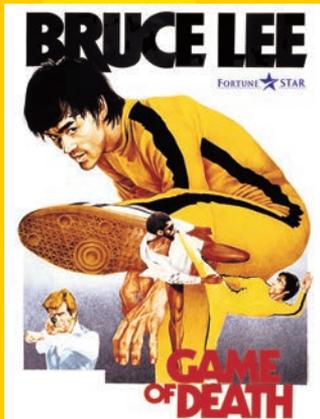
Snap's VP of content **Nick Bell** has stepped down after five years with the company, where he drove original programming. He is succeeded by former Huffington Post CEO Jared Grusd, who is chief strategy officer.



Nelonen Media exec **Unne Sormunen** was appointed MD of Endemol Shine Finland following the departure of Tarja Pääkkönen, who stepped down from the business after 12 years

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Media giants are closing their niche streamers to prepare for mega mainstream platforms, but will this mark the end of speciality services? Kaltrina Bylykbashi investigates



Will 2019 mark the end of niche SVOD?

The closure of Warner-owned streamers DramaFever and Filmstruck - which AT&T inherited in its takeover of Time Warner in 2018 - rocked the industry and its fans late last year. This was mostly because both services shared passionate audiences that ultimately generated dollars and had sustainable businesses that could have run on for some time yet.

DramaFever, a Korean soap opera-focused SVOD, had a steady 400,000 subscribers and was set to produce \$25m in revenue for the company in 2018. Meanwhile, FilmStruck had just rolled out its service internationally and had

some pretty famous superfans including Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Guillermo del Toro, who all campaigned against its closure in November.

But, as AT&T laid out its plans to create a new WarnerMedia service at the end of 2019 that will include content from HBO, Warner Bros. and Turner, it quickly became clear that the cable company is not looking to draw audiences in the hundreds of thousands. It's looking to draw viewers in the millions.

AT&T and Warner are not alone in this. Disney rid itself of Disney Movies Anywhere in early 2018 as it set up for Disney+, a family-friendly player set to launch towards the end of this year, while

Comcast's NBC shut down its comedy-focused streamer Seeso in late 2017 ahead of launching its rewards-based Watchback platform later in 2018.

Others also shuttered specialty services. Otter Media-owned Fullscreen closed its popular SVOD which focused on "social first" 13 to 30-year-olds in January 2018, while Canal Plus axed its CanalPlay service in June due to increased competition from Netflix.

With Apple, AT&T and Disney all launching their mainstream services this year, this space is only going to get tighter, so how will other specialty services from AMC's Shudder and Sundance Now, to Crunchyroll and Acorn TV fair in this increasingly competitive market?

Strategic imperative

Smithsonian Networks' head of digital media Joseph Giraldi says that running and growing a specialty streaming business in the current market is "incredibly challenging" due to rising programming costs, high competition to draw in top talent and major streamers encroaching on niche genres.

Despite this, in December 2018 Smithsonian Networks launched ad-free SVOD service Smithsonian Channel Plus just as news of Disney and AT&T's mega platforms fully emerged. The service will look to serve audiences passionate about factual content in various genres, including history, aerospace, nature and wildlife, and extend its existing Smithsonian Earth platform.

"It's hard to know where all of this will evolve but we believe that the reason to do this is because it's a strategic imperative," he says.

"If you don't have a proposition for people who want to have a subscription service or who want to have a way to consume your content, you're going to get left behind.

"Ultimately, you're not going to have longevity in the business because there are so many other companies vying for that consumer attention and money."

However, Giraldi admits that a rise in cost for programming and new entrants in the factual space have raised challenges for Smithsonian, particularly when it comes to rights competition.

"A decade or so ago you would enter into production agreements and there were a lot of ways that you could slice and dice the rights to financially optimise for airing on core linear channels, but now networks like ours want to hold rights to all media because we want to be able to exploit those rights as part of any consumer offering we come up with.

"There's financial pressure to make the dollars work harder because you not only want to hold on to all of the rights but you also want to produce things in 4K, which can be more expensive; you want international rights and that can also be more expensive."

There is also a high cost in going after good ideas, according to Giraldi. Non-fiction storytellers can now go anywhere from Netflix to Hulu, or even parent companies such as Showtime and CBS. "We're fighting against all the different venues for that story, so that puts pressure on the programming finances," he adds.



"There's a lot of pressure on unscripted storytelling and we're constantly needing to ensure we're evolving to meet the new demands of various audiences who are becoming more accustomed to different styles, and different ways of storytelling."

Giraldi still believes there will be niche services that succeed, but this will likely be tied to the evolution of new forms of packaging and selling services together.

"Yes, stand-alone subscription services and convincing a customer to pay for that can be challenging, but that's not to say that

businesses don't evolve to a place where, if you subscribe to around four premium services, it comes at a significantly reduced price, or you create mini-bundles to meet people's entertainment needs," he explains.

Consolidation is inevitable

With hundreds of a la carte subscriptions in the market, many execs TBI has spoken to speculate about how many services customers are really willing to pay for.

As a result, a range of carriers are beginning

to provide bundled packages, which allow consumers to choose a range of their favourite SVODs and watch them in one place. Giraldi suggests that this will be a lifeline for future niche platforms.

The trend is already emerging in 2019. This January, The Roku Channel revealed that it would offer premium subscriptions from Showtime, Starz and Epix, as well as smaller streamers such as Hopster and Viewster Anime, and charge its customers under one monthly bill.

CMC Markets' stock analyst David Madden believes that one way or the other, there will be fewer stand-alone streaming services in the coming year because consumers will tire of the mass amount of choice.

While Madden says that specialty services will not be entirely squeezed out, he does believe some will be acquired. "Smaller companies, the good ones, will be taken over," he says.

"There's so much money being thrown about, even the ones that aren't overly great might just be lucky enough to be acquired at a decent price, because there's such a frenzy and buying triggers more buying."

When consolidation happens at the top, as it has with Disney and AT&T, there's often a trickle-down effect according to Madden. "Everyone in the middle is going to have to go hard or go home, because the top players are spending billions of dollars with a mind to recoup that investment much later," he says.

In fact, some predict that it is these mid-tier players that are most at risk, as opposed to very niche services.

Guy Bisson, research director at Ampere Analysis says: "The very niche have a chance, it's the middle ground where that risk lies. Once you're in that middle ground, you're effectively saying 'I am offering a service that I think is on par with Netflix, Hulu or Amazon'. Therefore, you have to compete like-for-like. That's where the risk lies."

Mid-sized players focusing on movies and drama series, as DramaFever and Filmstruck did, are most at risk according to Bisson. "Canal Play, for example, is regionally specific. Its model is almost more at risk than a 'Gardening TV' or a 'Horseriding TV' SVOD," he says.

"Smaller streamers' costs are very low, so you can make a business without a great out rate. They also have a very specific audience



AMC Shudder's *Terrified*

that is searching out that very niche content."

No matter the target market, Bisson says we may see some "re-engineering of alignments and business models" from here on.

Specialty triumphs

For every shuttered niche player in 2018, there was one that proved its resilience.

Crunchyroll, a leading niche platform for anime and manga, amassed 2m subscribers and is one of the few AT&T and WarnerMedia-owned players to have survived the cull ahead of the launch of the new three-tiered mainstream SVOD.

The streamer has built its platform since 2006 and established itself as the voice of anime for a US audience by setting up live events and developing merchandising to go along with its programming.

Meanwhile, AMC's Shudder - focusing on horror movies and drama - says its subscribers streamed twice as much content in 2018 than they did in 2017, although it does not offer up specific numbers. It supports its business in a premium programming environment by licensing content for short windows and creating a slate of original content beside it.

Bruce Tuchman-backed NextUp, a streamer that focuses on stand-up comedy specials, has raised near £2m in funding over the course of two years.

NextUp MD and co-founder Daniel Berg says that although recent closures play on the team's mind, they believe that sticking to their specialty and USP will ensure success.

"It's really hard to know because companies can close for a whole variety of reasons and it's not always necessarily a reflection of how the market is doing, it can be anything from financial backing to management," he says.

"It's really hard to know when people are closing whether it's a reflection of things to come or it's a reflection of them."

Although NextUp doesn't reveal subscriber figures, Berg says the platform is "on track" and "growing at a healthy rate".

Even as platforms such as Netflix have encroached on its specialty genre, picking up a string of comedy specials from Ricky Gervais to Chris Rock, Berg says it has not had a direct impact on their business.

"In terms of cost we haven't really seen Netflix's wading into the market have an effect on us financially, because they've only been targeting relatively established names who are about 3% of the total comedians available whereas we're trying to showcase everyone."

Berg says it's the vast majority of the shows NextUp features as exclusive original productions that have been a "failsafe" for it. However, the core to its success has been the ground-up approach it has had with comedians, working with talent before they are internationally recognised. **TBI**



Highly Addictive Entertainment

TEMPTATION ISLAND

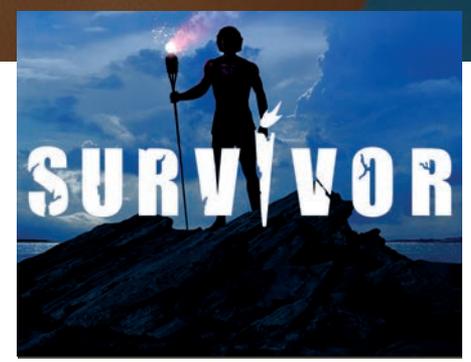
60' reality format
Living in separate villas full of sexy singles, couples put their love to the test and discover if there is another partner they are more compatible with



60' adventure reality format
Packed with secrets, hidden treasures and tempting traps, tribes of beautiful people compete to win new members to their apparently idyllic island communities



60' entertainment format
Two families from different backgrounds switch spouses and navigate issues like politics, classism, gender and race



60' adventure reality format
Survivor tests the spirit of ordinary, yet extraordinary people, marooned on an uninhabited tropical island

NATPE Booth #304



Inside No. Nine

Hamish Turner, programme director for Australia's Nine Network, outlines the channel's strategy post-Fairfax Media merger. Manori Ravindran reports.

With complete control of regional SVOD Stan and a diversifying content strategy, Australia's Nine Network is poised to become an industry heavyweight.

The commercial channel's acquisition of Fairfax Media sent shockwaves across the industry when it was first announced in July. Closing in December, the merger sees the network taking a 51.1% stake in Fairfax, creating a company with a combined market value of \$4.2bn.

Under the deal, Nine – the home of *Australian Ninja Warrior*, *Love Island Australia* and original reno reality series *The Block* – gains control of reputed newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian Financial Review*, as well as lucrative real estate listings website Domain.com.

However, the “crown jewel” in the merger, by most accounts, is regional SVOD Stan, which airs international hits such as *Billions* and *Twin Peaks* and is increasingly involved in high-end global collaborations, such as Amazon's *Electric Dreams* – an early acquisition – and *Romper Stomper*, a co-production with AMC's

SundanceTV.

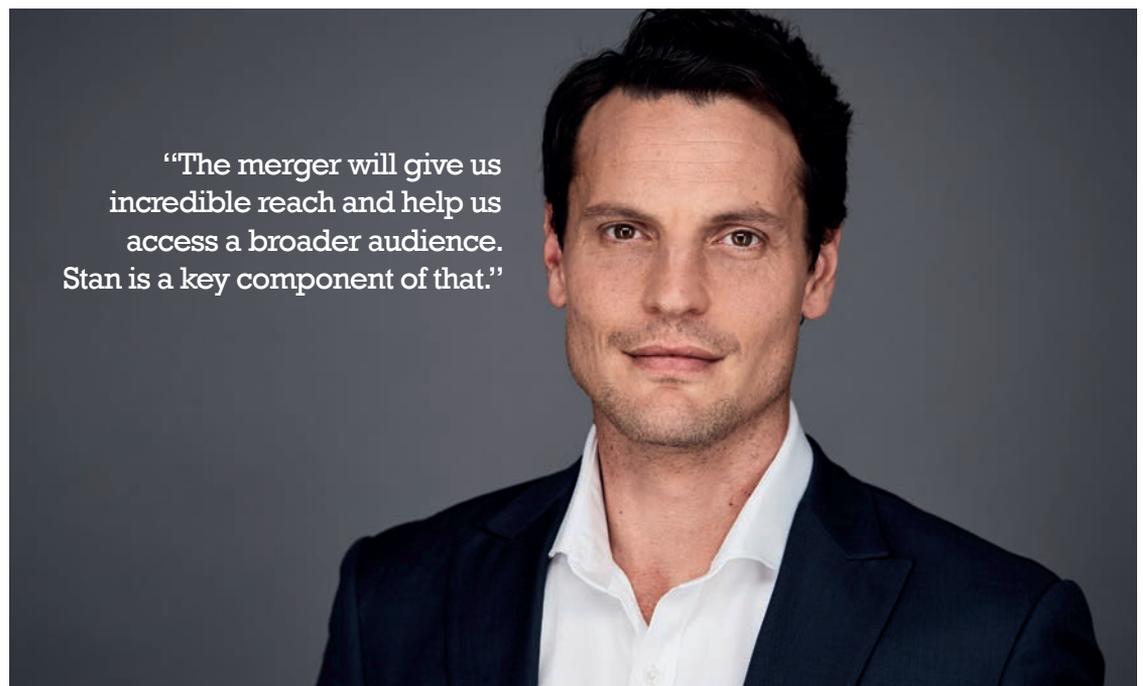
“The merger is about becoming a diversified media company and strengthening our position,” Nine programme director Hamish Turner tells TBI during a recent trip to Australia.

“It will give us incredible reach and help us access a broader audience. Stan is a key component of that. We already own 50% of the platform, and to have 100% will definitely help our buying power and give us greater scale in competing with local and global rivals.”

Turner, who became programme director in 2016 after serving as director of acquisitions, points out that Stan will be the “first port of call” for the channel's programming going forward.

“I wouldn't say we will necessarily hold content back from the other [SVOD platforms] but we do have an established and fruitful SVOD service,” he says.

The acquisition comes at a dynamic juncture in the Australian market, which has become the first country where the number of SVOD households has overtaken pay-TV homes in any market worldwide, according to Futuresource Consulting.



The British research firm said in November that SVOD uptake is expected to reach 6.1m subscriptions by the end of 2018, following “impressive growth” in the past four years, driven largely by Netflix.

“Netflix continues to witness a rapid rise in Australia and is undoubtedly one of its most successful international markets,” commented Joanna Wright, senior market analyst at Futuresource.

While Netflix is the market leader in the SVOD space, pay-TV operator Foxtel and its Foxtel Now service follows close behind, alongside Stan.

Towards the lower end of SVOD uptake are services such as YouTube Premium – which recently revealed that it is moving into an AVOD model in 2019 – as well as Fetch and Amazon Prime Video.

Turner notes that “acquisition” of international content via output deals will continue to be an important piece of the Stan offering, though the platform will also invest in Australian production, which is becoming more global-facing and travelling internationally.

Stan, which is led by CEO Mike Sneesby, recently enjoyed success with local original *No Activity*, which was picked up in the US by actor Will Ferrell’s production company Gary Sanchez and adapted for CBS streamer All Access.

Turner reckons there is scope for more international collaborations of this nature. “There is opportunity there, and we have seen that in the drama space.”

But he is also quick to note that the business is hesitant to “get into a position where you’re creating drama for an international audience, only to turn your back on the domestic audience.”

“Australian drama has a very unique voice. That’s what we embrace and it’s what the international audience enjoys as well,” says Turner, citing Nine Network shows such as *Doctor Doctor*, *Underbelly* and *McLeod’s Daughters*, all of which have “travelled well”.

“In terms of distribution and funding, we are keen to further those relationships internationally and we will start to do that on some dramas.

“In terms of the amount that international distributors are paying upfront, it [reduces] the cost quite significantly. But we’re not giving away huge amounts of rights from domestic, as we are driven domestically in terms of revenue. However, that doesn’t mean we don’t have an eye on international.”

The exec notes that Nine is “different” from other Australian broadcasters in that it co-produces with “the biggest producers” in the market, such as Endemol Shine Australia on *Family Food Fight*. “We are looking at that model a bit more,” he says.

Another recent success story has been Nine’s adaptation of ITV2 hit *Love Island* – a journey that began with the acquisition of the UK show for Nine’s AVOD platform Nine Now before being localised.



Love Island Australia

Viewing data revealed a “voracious appetite” for the series, says Turner, adding that the British show did “huge numbers” on Nine Now, ultimately giving them the confidence to greenlight an Australian version for youth-skewing digital channel 9Go!, which was also made available on Nine Now.

“We had more people consuming *Love Island Australia* on Nine Now than on the linear channel. It was an interesting test case for us, and showed it had a very, very young audience.”

The ambition for this year’s second series is to garner an “older audience” – an objective that will see the programme move from 9Go! to Nine Network this year.

“We want to broaden out the show, following the UK and German strategy,” says Turner.

As for whether Nine Now could merge with Stan in the future, the exec says there are no plans to do so currently.

“Nine Now is delivering some good returns within the [broadcaster VOD] space. There is monetisation there in the long term, though at the moment, that market hasn’t yet reached maturity in Australia, so we have some ambitious growth targets. We will still run it as a separate business in the short term.” **TBI**

HOW FAIRFAX NEWSPAPERS WILL OPERATE UNDER NINE

The Fairfax merger, which was completed on 10 December, has been met with concern by some media commentators in Australia, particularly journalists at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who are anxious that the publication’s editorial independence will be compromised.

Kate McClymont, the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s top investigative reporter, wrote in July: “Our concern is will this be maintained? What is going to happen when the two companies merge? In some ways it’s disappointing to know that really our sole attraction was Stan and Domain, not our journalism.”

However, Turner insists that Nine – the name of the combined business – will allow the business to operate as it has.

“The key for us is not to homogenize,” he explains. “What [the print brands] bring is a unique editorial voice and the last thing we want to do is hinder that. Whatever we do is about strengthening everyone.”



Windows of opportunity

Media giants building SVODs to rival Netflix are talking the talk, but who will walk the walk? Manori Ravindran investigates the knock-on effects of consolidation and the bigger picture around windowing and rights ownership

If 2018's media disruption taught us anything, it was to expect the unexpected in the laser-focused drive for scale. As potential outcomes of mega-mergers such as Disney/21st Century Fox, AT&T/Time Warner and Comcast/Sky become clearer, many of 2019's most salient conversations will center on rights ownership and windowing.

An illuminating flashpoint in the ownership

dialogue was Netflix and WarnerMedia's \$100m deal for the latter's 24-year-old sitcom *Friends*, which has been streaming on the SVOD since January 2015 and prompted international outcry from fans when it was revealed that the streamer's license was due to expire in January 2019.

Although WarnerMedia boss John Stankey had bullishly warned of a "substantial structural

shift" that will see competitors' libraries looking thinner when the business launches its three-tier streamer later this year and plucks its content from rivals, it made the shock move of renewing its Netflix deal, leading many to puzzle at the new frontier of content distribution.

"If you're WarnerMedia and you have a platform, how do you map through where you put content, while making sales elsewhere?"



Friends

asks Tim Mutimer, CEO of *Temptation Island* distributor Banijay Rights.

“The obvious thing would be to make *Friends* exclusive to their platform, but then checks are waved and you need to take that seriously. There is this assumption that people will want to integrate and keep everything on their own services, but big distributors have always looked at where the money is coming from and made



The Haunting Of Hill House

choices based on that.”

Indeed, one senior distribution exec with knowledge of Disney’s sales strategy in recent months tells TBI that the Mouse “hasn’t yet collapsed the VOD window to move content to [Disney+] more quickly – they still want that money.

“At MIPCOM, Disney was looking to do short-term international deals for good content, because the international Disney+ streaming service isn’t going to launch as quickly as they thought, so [those sales execs] are thinking, ‘Oh, we might not launch for a year? Let’s see if Netflix wants to buy some stuff,’” says the exec.

“They haven’t signed anything at the level of *Friends* with Netflix, but they were having some discussions.”

Jane Millichip, managing director of pay-TV operator Sky’s distribution arm Sky Vision, points out that despite “very bold statements” made by some big players, their narratives have “softened a bit” as they begin to grapple with the reality of losing short-term revenue.

“Anyone with an ambition for their own SVOD, which is most of the big players, is assessing the value of harvesting their own rights for their services. But there is always a short to medium-term impact that could be negative on revenue.”

Millichip highlights that the question of whether or not to sell or hold on to content

becomes particularly significant – and potentially dire – when you consider the impact on new projects, particularly within scripted.

The loss of licensing and ancillary revenues as businesses move from programme sales-based revenue to subscription-based models could have a serious impact on funding.

“There is a massive cost impact in de-harvesting rights, because we’ve built our business model for programme funding on the fact that we will monetise up to 40% of the budget through ancillary sales, and now we’re looking to potentially not do that in favour of having those shows on our own services.

“But unless you already have an established SVOD with a considerable subscriber base, you have something of a hole in your funding plan, because initially you aren’t going to derive the same revenue from a subscription that you did from license fees and sales.”

The shift in model, she says, will have a substantial impact on the “entire licensing world” and how much content is held back or sold openly and freely, and how this affects rights and windows.

A supplier’s market?

For some content suppliers, however, top-level changes in the market have put them in the catbird seat.



TRENDWATCH: COULD BLOCKCHAIN SHAKE UP TV?

Originally created to support digital currency bitcoin as record-keeping technology, blockchain has broken free of its contentious association and is increasingly applied across various industries, including television.

Despite enduring confusion around its application, the concept is fairly straightforward: blockchain is effectively a digital ledger system that contains a record of each step in any transaction, financial or otherwise. This record is incorruptible and transparent to anyone who is able to access the system.

Anita O'Donnell, co-founder of media entertainment advisers Media Minds, tells TBI that blockchain's widespread appeal is informed by a drive towards trust in deal-making.

"When you are using blockchain, there is no one partner that has to have the final stamp. Because of the way blockchain works, there is a certain amount of people that have to approve every transaction, therefore decentralising the trust."

According to O'Donnell, 2019 will see blockchain finally emerge as a legitimate tech that exists outside the "wrapping" of bitcoin, and can be used, for example, to record deal-making in TV. Blockchain technology lends itself particularly well to back-catalogue deals.

"You can do those types of transactions on a blockchain-enabled platform," explains O'Donnell, outlining how a distributor with thousands of hours of non-premium content could adopt a blockchain system for a deal with a buyer.

"You can do your transaction using the smart contracts ability, pay your money, have the money go from A to B, and upon receipt of the money, that can trigger back the video file. It provides an end-to-end solution in which you are buying rights and delivering video content without human contact."

While the above may sound like existing distribution portal TRX, O'Donnell explains that a crucial difference is that any transaction can go offline with TRX.

"If I were to reinvent that portal, I would put it on the blockchain so that every element of it all has to live within the 'gated garden,'" she says.

Elsewhere, broadcasters could implement blockchain for rights acquisitions, while production companies could adopt blockchain for music clearances or rights renewals.

"But the point is that for all these transactions, you still need finance people to establish the rules of engagement, so those jobs aren't going anywhere," says O'Donnell.

Dan Cohen, president of worldwide television licensing for *The Haunting Of Hill House* and *Catch-22* producer Paramount Television, reasons that as Disney's acquisition of Fox sees the Mouse place a large amount of Fox content on Disney+, and as WarnerMedia preps its own streamer, these changes will greatly reduce the amount of content available to traditional broadcast clients as well as Netflix and Amazon.

"That then presents budgets that these players have to spend elsewhere," says Cohen. "Similarly, if Fox does not extend its HBO output deal, there will then be more capacity at HBO. And that type of scenario is happening globally."

Ultimately, these market shifts present an especially ample opportunity for Paramount, which has "no intentions of growing a streaming service to compete".

"We want to do business with everybody, so we have moved up the food chain in terms of being a viable option for our clients.

"Even if we don't have anything that an SVOD or traditional client wants, they aren't worried about our ulterior motives or agenda."

Similarly, Jonathan Ford, EVP of sales for Kew Media Distribution, notes that WarnerMedia's service will serve as a "new customer" for the distributor.

"While Disney+ will be built using Disney's own content, I can see Warner looking to buy exclusive rights for their service, and for me, that presents an opportunity," he says.

"The merging of buyers does create an issue with potentially fewer buyers, but it also means that the people at these merged entities are stronger, more sustainable and more willing to do business."

Sky Vision's Millichip, however, warns against the assumption that it is entirely a seller's market, particularly at the producer level.

"Producers are going to be challenged by a knock-on effect from consolidation," she says.

"Yes, there are potentially more buyers than ever and more platforms to sell to, but each of those buyers requires more rights. Terrestrial broadcasters are no longer defined by the technical means of delivery – they also need catch-up and SVOD. Therefore, you don't necessarily have a great deal of opportunity to do a lot of windowing."

Woodcut Media boss Kate Beal agrees that she may have to give up more rights in the future, but reasons that "as long as [partners]



Anne With An E

pay for them, that is fine.”

“I want a fair price for a fair product. If you’re giving those rights for the universe, then a buyer must pay for the universe.”

On-demand opportunity

One broadcaster that is newly navigating challenges around windowing is Canadian public broadcaster CBC, which launched its streaming service Gem in December in a bid to offer not only CBC programming, but the “jewels of Canadian content”.

Just as Brits know to find uniquely British programming on the BBC’s iPlayer, CBC boss Catherine Tait hopes that “anyone looking for Canadian content will go to Gem” and, akin to the joint SVOD being mulled over by UK broadcasters, she is in conversation to join forces with other Canadian on-demand platforms, such as Bell Media’s Crave.

“Our primary competition isn’t our domestic colleagues, it’s the global digital giants that

are monetising content across worldwide audiences – something we have never been able to do,” says the former Telefilm Canada and Duopoly exec, who assumed her CBC role in July.

In recent years, CBC has elevated its programming through several high-profile co-productions with partners such as Netflix, but it is now running into a “very challenging” situation as it looks to keep some of that content, such as *Alias Grace* and *Anne With An E*, on its fledgling platform.

According to Tait, who describes “vigorous conversations” with the streaming giant around rights, the quandary represents the “nub of the challenge that all broadcasters have in co-financing with Netflix”.

“Yes, *Alias Grace* is on Netflix in Canada, but there are holdbacks, and when their license runs out, it returns to us. As it is for all broadcasters, the managing of rights with Netflix in our own territory remains a tough challenge.

“What’s key is figuring out how to continue

working with them or Amazon because, as a public broadcaster, we need to leverage our limited entertainment dollars and they provide a very important piece of the financing. For *Anne With An E*, Netflix came in with a significant part of the budget, and that’s enormous visibility for our talent. Do we want to walk away from that? Absolutely not. But are there challenges in how we manage windowing around the platform when they’re in our market? Of course.”

Tait acknowledges that while Canadians may choose Netflix and Amazon as their primary service, “we want us, CBC and Gem, to be their second or third choice”.

Matthew Graham, SVP and GM for AMC-owned Acorn TV, is equally realistic about the landscape and his SVOD’s place within it.

“Netflix’s global expansion has laid the groundwork for people like us to follow in their path,” he says. “As we have shown in North America, Acorn is a great add-on service to a mass-appeal service such as Netflix.”

The US streaming service, which was launched in the US and Canada in 2011 and specialises in British television, was acquired by AMC last year – a move that has “opened up opportunities”, including a significant expansion into 30 countries, including India, Australia, Spain, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Africa.

Another recent coup was snapping up first-window US streaming rights to BBC thriller *Line of Duty*, which previously aired on Hulu, premiering in 2012.

The Handmaid’s Tale streamer now has the second window for the show Stateside after Acorn.

“It reflects our growing industry recognition,” explains Graham. “We have the marketing model to get shows on the service in front of the right audience at a scale that matters.”

Kew Media Distribution’s Ford adds that the new deal came down to Acorn’s specific focus as a niche SVOD as opposed to Hulu’s “mass market general entertainment service”.

“Acorn is more targeted, and in terms of giving the series the profile in the US and the marketing backing, it made sense to go with them for the first window.

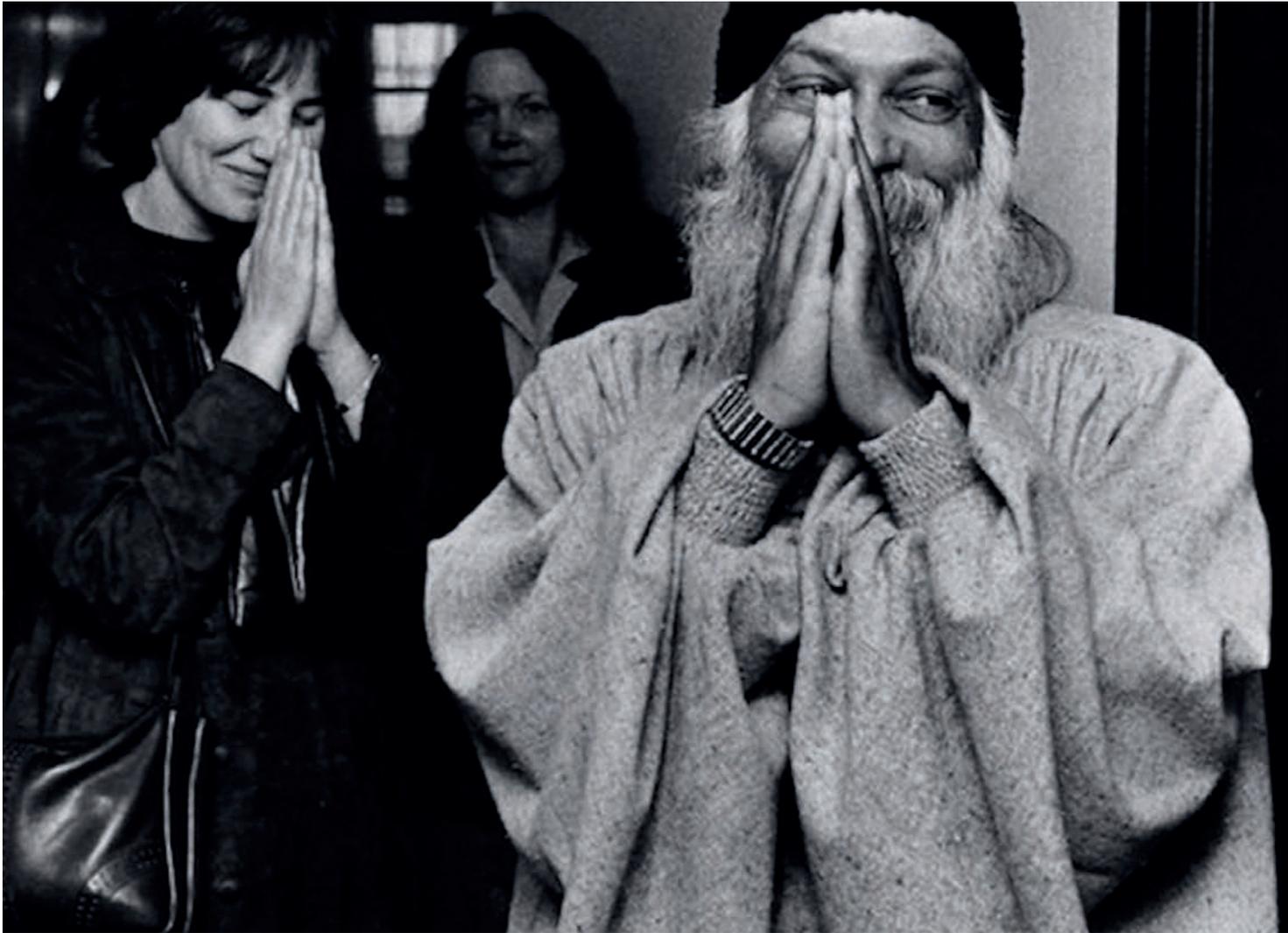
“As the world switches from linear to on-demand, if you consider the cost of subscribing to one or two key SVOD services and a couple of niche platforms, that cost isn’t any more than subscribing to basic cable. There is an appetite there.” **TBI**

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How Netflix is shaking up the documentary world

Netflix is raising the bar for factual to premium levels and introducing 'box sets' and 'binge-watching' into commissioning vocabulary, all while growing traditional broadcasters' budgets and ambitions for documentary. Tim Dams reports.

Netflix has famously spent its way into the homes of viewers around the world by backing original dramas such as *The Crown*, *13 Reasons Why* and *Stranger Things*. In the process, the streamer has upended the scripted market, helping to drive up ambition, spending levels and the number of shows being made across the board.

Less remarked upon, however, is how Netflix is doing the same in the non-scripted market.

Original series such as *Making A Murderer*, *Wild Wild Country*, *The Staircase* and *Evil Genius* are proof that documentaries are every bit as ambitious, compelling and bingeable as hit dramas – but at a much more affordable price point.

In fact, Netflix recently revealed that series two of *Making A Murderer* was its second most binge-watched show of 2018 in the US, ahead of hit dramas such as *Bodyguard* and *Orange Is The New Black*. Indeed, many of Netflix's most



Wild Wild Country

successful documentaries focus on a single story that unfolds over multiple episodes – just like drama.

“They are using the same techniques as serial drama. You watch one episode and then you have to know what happens – you binge-watch on the edge of your seat,” says Blink Films MD Dan Chambers, noting that the technique works brilliantly with crime docs, but can be more challenging to apply to other subjects.

This level of premium documentary is steadily influencing factual programme makers and commissioners around the world. Producers report that many broadcaster commissioners now say they want documentaries to “look Netflixy” and echo the epic and cinematic feel of a Netflix title.

“You just have to look at the number of UK commissioners who casually use the word

‘box set’ when they talk about the ambition they have, or what they are commissioning in terms of storytelling intensity, compelling authorial view, scale, bingeability and multiple episodes,” says Endemol Shine UK director of factual Kim Shillinglaw. “The casual use of the word ‘box set’ is something we owe to Netflix.”

The impact of the global SVOD is also filtering down to production, with directors and cameramen referencing shows such as *Wild Wild Country* as inspirations on set, says Chambers.

He cites the thoughtful lighting and beautiful wide set-ups of the interviews in *Wild Wild Country*, a six-parter about the rise and fall of the extraordinary commune founded in Ohio by Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in the 1970s.

Others, like October Films’ creative director Matt Robins, say that streamers such as Netflix have ‘raised the bar in documentary storytelling’.

He reckons the impact of the streamers on non-scripted has been most pronounced in the US, particularly in the cable market, which has traditionally focused on carefully packaged and processed content designed to please advertisers.

Now, he says, “There’s a realisation that documentary can be as impactful as fiction.” Budgets and ambition have picked up as a result – as have the number of feature docs being made.

“Netflix has, over the last three to four years, proven that people will watch documentaries over 45 minutes long on challenging subjects, and even with subtitles,” says Spring Films MD Richard Melman.

Feature-length frenzy

Netflix has “opened up” traditional broadcasters, who are keener to back feature-length documentaries. He cites Spring Films’ recent doc *Meeting Gorbachev*, directed by Werner Herzog and Andre Singer and backed by A&E.

“I don’t think that would have happened a few years ago,” says Melman.

He also points to Nat Geo’s new feature doc, *Free Solo*, about the first free solo climb of famed El Capitan’s 3,000-foot vertical rock face in California’s Yosemite National Park.

“It’s 90 minutes of amazing entertainment,” says Melman. Separately, Nat Geo has also

invested heavily in Darren Aronofsky’s 10-part portrait of planet Earth, *One Strange Rock*, narrated by Will Smith.

CNN Films, meanwhile, has backed two of this year’s hit documentaries – *RBG*, which focuses on Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman to ever serve on the Supreme Court, and *Three Identical Strangers*, the incredible story of three complete strangers who discover at age 19 that they are identical triplets separated at birth.



“The casual use of the word ‘box set’ is something we owe to Netflix.”

**Kim Shillinglaw,
Endemol Shine**

Netflix has acquired a number of Spring Films’ feature-length docs, including *City 40* and *Night Will Fall*. The streamer also backed Werner Herzog’s volcano doc *Into the Inferno* as a Netflix Original.

Melman says he has no idea how the films have performed, as Netflix doesn’t release viewing data, even to producers. But he’s clearly pleased with the response to *Into the Inferno*, which played all over the world via Netflix.

“I stopped counting after 300 newspaper and magazine articles about the film – it got really talked about as a result [of their backing],” he says.

Oscar-winning documentary producer Simon Chinn (*Man on Wire*, *Searching for Sugarman*) traces the evolution of the premium long-form doc farther back than Netflix, pointing out that the genre took root with the backing of broadcasters such as HBO.

In fact, HBO’s four-part documentary series, *The Defiant Ones*, which tells the stories of Jimmy Iovine and Dr. Dre, is referenced by many producers as a recent inspiration.

“What has changed is that Netflix has shown a voracious appetite for documentaries. They are doing more feature documentaries and premium documentary series than anyone else,” Chinn notes, adding that Netflix is also paying as much as anyone else for documentaries.

The producer agrees that there is “a buzz around docs” that there hasn’t been for some time.

Indeed, 2018 was something of a break-out year for feature documentaries. Four films, including *Free Solo*, *Won't You Be My Neighbour?*, *RBG* and *Three Identical Strangers*, crossed the \$10m mark at the North American box office — something only achieved by a single documentary in 2017 — with Mr. Rogers doc *Won't You Be My Neighbour?* more than doubling even that impressive figure.

Series reinvention

Chinn believes it is “a tiny bit reductive” to link the growth in popularity of documentaries to Netflix, but allows that the business, as a global platform, can show extensive series such as *Wild Wild Country*, *The Staircase* and *Making A Murderer*, and has “thrown down a gauntlet” to traditional broadcasters around the world.

“The fact is that the BBC and Channel 4 in the UK now have to compete against Netflix documentaries, and that means that they have to up their game.”

As an example of how traditional broadcasters are meeting the challenge, he cites BBC Two commissioning Chinn’s prodco Lightbox to make a feature-length documentary about disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein directed by Ursula Macfarlane, which premieres at the Sundance Film Festival in February. The exec wonders if a feature-length doc like this might have been embraced in previous years.

Chinn also believes that the “very prescriptive formatting” of documentaries might be receding somewhat in light of the rise of more complex, ambitious feature-length series.

Endemol Shine’s Shillinglaw agrees that Netflix in particular, but also broadcasters such as Nat Geo and A&E, have “really pushed at what the documentary series might look like.”

“From a creative point of view, their influence on the documentary landscape has been very stimulating,” says Shillinglaw. “They have helped to raise the ambition and level right across the global documentary industry, including here in the UK.”

She adds that British commissioners are struggling to compete, however, with the budgets that debt-fuelled companies like Netflix can offer.

But Shillinglaw does strike a cautious note in her appraisal of Netflix as a customer for production companies like Endemol Shine, pointing out that traditional channels will continue to be “important customers, and I see them representing the majority of our customer base for quite some time to come.”



Free Solo



The Staircase

“I don’t think Netflix is a golden goose,” she adds. “Nor do I think that Netflix is going to eat British broadcasting alive. I think they are a very interesting addition to the viewing, selling and buying landscape.”

Shillinglaw adds that while there are “certain projects” she would undoubtedly take to Netflix or a streamer, there are “a large number of projects” that are best suited to a broadcaster.

Growing competition

Other documentary makers, meanwhile, say that competition in the documentary market is intensifying.

“The stakes have been raised for producers,” says October’s Matt Robins, who is currently executive producing a six-part series about the lives of America’s First Ladies for CNN.

“You are now up against Hollywood producers and stars like Will Smith. Everyone wants to play in the documentary genre.”

Robins reckons that the cable networks have

also become more focused on development as they look to back standout documentaries.

“The producers who will thrive in years to come will be those that understand the importance of developing access, and that relationships [with documentary subjects] are built over three to five years, before you have even shot a single frame.”

Those producers who do manage to thrive will do so at a time of growing popularity for documentaries among younger audiences.

“The youth market – 18-35 year olds – is starting to come back to documentaries,” says Melman. “I was told five years ago that you couldn’t get young people to watch documentaries because of their short attention span.”

But something has changed. Perhaps it is that younger audiences are seeking facts, insight and knowledge at a time when the world is convulsed by political upheaval, characterised by the presidency of Donald Trump and Brexit.

“A documentary film can be something of a guiding light in a dark and dangerous world,” says Melman. **TBI**



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The future is factual



Colourisation, tech-led production and podcast-inspired fare are topping the list of unscripted trends on the rise in 2019. Manori Ravindran reports.

An SVOD-fuelled factual renaissance may be creating a survival of the fittest in the production community, but it is also sparking more international collaboration than ever before.

The necessity of global co-production for top-tier factual was particularly evident at the recent World Congress of Science and Factual Producers (WCSFP) in Brisbane, where players such as Nat Geo, Discovery and Channel 4 displayed a new-found flexibility around co-production in the face of SVOD might.

Just weeks after unveiling *Our Planet*, its long-gestating, multi-million-dollar collaboration

with David Attenborough, Netflix made a bold statement in Australia, where new recruit Sara Edelson – Los Angeles-based manager for original docs – eschewed the SVOD’s low profile strategy at markets and met delegates out in the open across four full days.

TBI understands the former Vulcan Productions development exec has been transparent about high-performing natural history on the platform, and is intent on sourcing more projects, alongside premium science and history shows. Crucially, the platform is believed to be increasingly open to international co-productions for high-end factual.

Edelson’s conspicuous presence is an

encouraging sign of growing demand for factual content across the SVOD space – further demonstrated by overtures from China’s Tencent, Youku and Bilibili, all of whom courted producers, broadcasters and distributors down under.

The following trends are key takeaways from WCSFP, all of which reflect a robust and healthy marketplace for factual content.

Tech-led storytelling: 20K is here

NHK natural history commissioner Tetsunori Kekuchi wowed audiences with 8K footage, which conveys 20-times more information

than regular 2K (HD). One clip from a recent production showed a diver swimming in a mix of fresh and saltwater, with each body of water clearly distinguished in ultra-high resolution. You had to see it to believe it – though when most viewers will be able to do so remains unclear. Even at WCSFP, the footage was shown on a 2K monitor, representing the comical gap between mainstream hardware and pioneering audiovisual tech. Kekuchi bashfully admitted he only had a 2K television at home.

NHK's science team is also experimenting with 20K, and while Kekuchi isn't personally involved in those efforts, the exec made a strong case for the scientific value of seeing microscopic details that can provide crucial information about some organisms.

Other cutting-edge tech was demonstrated in Arte France's *700 Sharks* in which a customized ring of 4K GoPro Black cameras captures a shark feed in French Polynesia, and Channel 5's *Nocturnal Britain* from Pioneer Productions, which uses new low-light camera technology.

Distributor-led commissioning in robust health

Lilla Hurst, co-founder of co-production broker and distributor Drive, spoke at length about the benefits of distributor-led commissioning, an area in which the business has had a fair amount of success.

Crucially, Hurst notes that the types of commissions to come out of these models are generally low-budget fare made for around \$100K/hour. "The reason these sorts of series are working for buyers is because a lot of them have spent a lot of money on premium projects that don't take a lot of space in their schedules, and they've realised they have huge gaps and need shows to plug them with."

Hurst says distributors such as Drive want to give prodcos a "flow of commissions" while they're working on bigger, tougher projects.

Colourisation craze

While Peter Jackson's First World War doc *They Shall Not Grow Old* has recently put the colourisation technique on the map, French production company Composite Films has been specialising in the colourisation and restoration of black and white footage for years, working on Arrow Media's *America In Color* for Smithsonian and Stranger Than Fiction's *Australia In*

Colour for SBS. CEO Samuel Francois-Steininger tells TBI that one minute of colourisation can cost between \$3,000-\$10,000 and take a number of weeks. The business has a team of 50 working across various projects. Describing a painstaking research process to ensure colours used are accurate, the exec compares the technique to a "police or forensic investigation".

Biting the bullet-chat

With 92m monthly active users and 450m page views per day, Chinese digital player Bilibili is fast becoming a top port of call for Western broadcast partners. It is in the works with Nat Geo Wild on the doc *China's Hidden Kingdoms* and TBI understands the BBC is keen to work with the platform on four-part series *China On Stage* from Lion TV, building on an existing relationship through which the youth-skewing streamer launched local *Top Gear* spin-off, *Borrowed Gear*.

One innovation out of Bilibili is "bullet chatting" – a ticker of sorts that runs across the top of its programmes, featuring a running commentary from its subscribers. A similar version of the tool is used on Facebook Watch, in which viewers comment on videos in real time.

Leah Zhang, director of international acquisitions and collaborations for Bilibili, says: "Some may find it distracting, but the more you get used to it, the more you realize you get so many more details. We can also build programming on the back of it. When we aired *Planet Earth II*, we asked users to guess how many birds were on the screen in one particular scene."

International collaborations growing

The piecing together of international co-productions for factual has been standard practice for several years, but new broadcasters are coming to the table. As they struggle to keep up with the deep pockets of Netflix and Amazon, channels such as Discovery Science – historically more US-facing – are now engaging in co-productions, such as the *Ice Age* project with Channel 4.

"The model is very important because broadcaster budgets are being cut and they don't have the dollars anymore to commission \$400K per hour programmes," Looking Glass International founder Nha-Uyen Chau tells TBI.

"Discovery Science budgets have been cut significantly. Within the Discovery family of channels, the US isn't commissioning as much as they do. Even for our US producer clients, projects that would normally have been commissioned and made via a single US broadcaster now have to explore the international market."

Chau notes that this juncture is where distributors become vital. "We now have access to projects we didn't five years ago because they were being fully commissioned."

Feel-good shows lead the way

Optomen's *Employable Me* for BBC Two was championed as one of the most successful formats of the last two years. The Australian adaptation has been a hit on ABC, which is

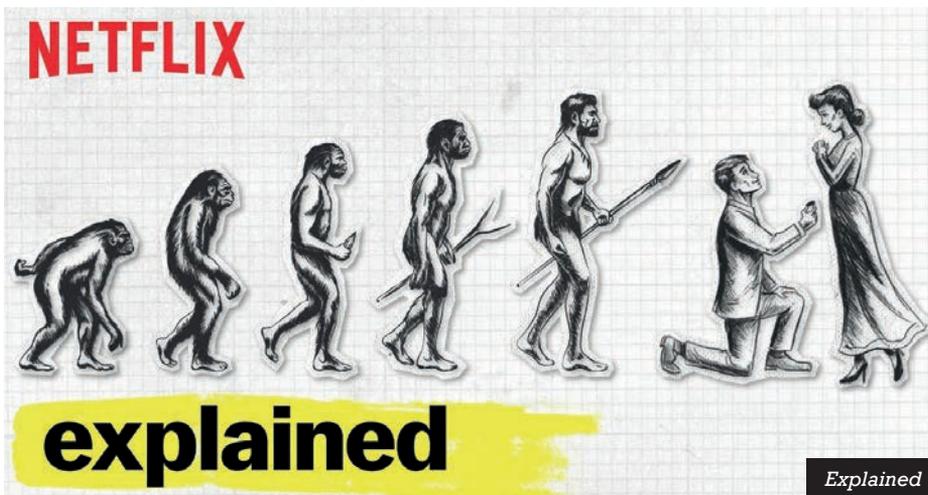




Employable Me



The Teacher's Pet



Explained

spinning off its own show called *Love On The Spectrum* from Northern Pictures. Other feel-good triumphs include Tencent's *72 Hours*, an adaptation of the NHK format that shoots in one place for 72 hours, capturing ordinary people's lives and emotions, which can be deeply poignant. The crowd-pleaser has racked up around 242m views.

Podcast TV

While adapting podcasts into TV has been in vogue for some time (SVODs such as Amazon are leaders in the field with dramas *Lore* and *Homecoming*), factual is now getting into the ring with Australian true crime podcast *The Teacher's Pet* getting both scripted and unscripted adaptations.

Meanwhile, public broadcaster ABC Australia launched true crime podcast *Unravel* last summer, following its best journalists as they investigate unsolved crimes. The podcast

was then turned into a three-part show for the main channel. Josie Mason-Campbell, head of unscripted for ABC, says podcasts as IP are appealing in the true crime space because they provide compelling "present tense" storytelling.

"We knew we couldn't just rehash a cold case. We didn't want to do tabloid crime, where there's a crime per episode," she says. "It had to be [a project] that said something more about what Australians cared about, and which said more about who we are as a nation."

Short-form boom

The rise of SVOD has allowed content creators to play with the length of programming, with prominent examples this year including Vox Media's *Explained* series for Netflix, in which 15-minute episodes focus on explanations of myriad matters, from female orgasms to K pop. New Zealand producer Kyle Murdoch, MD of Blue Ant-owned NHNZ, advocates for

short-form natural history as a quicker way for producers to engage with audiences as they work on longer-term projects.

"We looked at our footage and storytelling and realised that we can repackage and tell the same stories in small packets," he says. NHNZ has now created a short-form label called Wild Studios to do exactly that. The business recently partnered with Borneo Orangutan Foundation to make Channel 4/Love Nature co-production *Orangutan Jungle School*. "We created lots of short-form clips, which were then promoted online by the foundation. It engaged a larger audience outside of the TV audience," he says.

Still room for niche SVODs

While niche SVODs are struggling to survive against the crush of heavy-hitting SVOD players such as Disney+, Dutch distributor Off The Fence revealed more details about their SVOD offering Waterbear Network, which is described as Netflix meets Ebay, Expedia and Groupon. The platform is an interactive SVOD that connects users with NGOs, producers and broadcasters.

"Many countries have multiple NGOs and they don't connect with each other at all. It's our ambition to connect all those NGOs together. They are generating footage to put up on the platform," explains Off The Fence MD Allison Bean.

"You have premium content that you pay for, but there is also content that is free. While *Blue Planet* could be playing on the main screen, there is a sidebar you can press to see the latest news on conservation and have a live chat with scientists. If you're interested in the manta rays you've just seen on screen, you can also look up travel options to that area." **TBI**

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Buyers Briefing | What buyers want

Specialist factual commissioners reveal their wishlists and programming strategies for 2019



BERNADETTE MCDAID

Commissioning editor, Nat Geo (International)

Top priorities: science, history, travel, space

McDaid says the global broadcaster is most interested in ideas “that speak to the inspirational and aspirational nature” of Nat Geo as a legacy brand. “Our tentpole areas include, but are not limited to, science, innovation, adventure, exploration, natural history, environment and sustainability.”

The channel prefers series that have the potential to return, but all ideas – including pitches for singles, feature docs and formats – are welcome.

While Nat Geo, which will soon sit under the Disney

portfolio following the Mouse’s acquisition of 21st Century Fox, generally takes worldwide rights for its suite of global channels, the business is increasingly open to international co-productions, says McDaid, who says the broadcaster assesses these deals on a “case-by-case basis”.

The exec advises that some slots are still available for 2019, but her “primary focus is 2020 and beyond, where there is significant opportunity”.

While Nat Geo has grabbed headlines – and Oscar love – for premium feature docs such as *Jane* and *Free Solo* alongside high-end series such as *One Strange Rock* and *Mars*, McDaid insists that the most important criteria for her are “originality, ambition, global appeal and scale”. “This can be achieved across a myriad of price points,” she says.

CRAIG HUNTER

Lead commissioner, science and specialist factual, BBC (UK)

SIMON YOUNG

Commissioning editor, BBC

Top priorities: environment-focused titles, social experiments, history box sets

“Pleasure” is the programming through-line across specialist factual at the BBC, with both Simon Young and Craig Hunter encouraging producers to bring them uplifting content that tackles heavy topics in lighthearted ways.

Hunter is keen for “more programmes about the environment that aren’t just doom and gloom” while Young tells producers “not to presume what history is to the BBC”.

He cites 72 Films’ *A Dangerous Dynasty: House of Assad* for BBC Two, which tells the story of Syria’s Assad dynasty, including Bashar and Asma’s journey to become president and first lady of Syria. “I want to find the next history box set,” says Young.

The commissioner advises producers to keep an open



mind around history programming, pointing to Atlantic Productions’ hour-long doc *The Coronation* for BBC One, which reveals the story of the Crown Jewels and the ceremony for which they are used. “To us, that fits the bill of a history programme,” he says.

Hunter is looking for more social experiments, such as Outline Productions’ *No More Boys And Girls: Can Our Kids Go Gender Free?* for BBC Two, in which a mixed year three class on the Isle of Wight receives a term of gender-neutral treatment.

MARC ETKIND

General manager, Science Channel (US)

Top priorities: youth-skewing fun series in the vein of *Battlebots* and *MythBusters Junior*, space and engineering, mystery, big blue-chip specials

The main filter for the Discovery-owned channel – known internationally as Discovery Science – is “is it cool and reflective of the exciting times we live in?” says Etkind, adding that the current brand is “mind blown”.

“The US is very divided right now, and some people are anti-science. But we’re on track to have the highest-rated year ever in the channel’s history, so despite all the anti-science, there’s something about science and tech that is still resonating and exciting people.”

In addition to science and engineering, Etkind wants programmes that broach these fields through other means. “Mystery is another strong genre, and these can be classic mysteries such as who built the pyramids, to more modern mysteries such as what did Tesla really build?”

The exec references recent docuseries commission *Houdini’s Last Secrets*. “We had a magician rebuilding

Houdini’s escapes. You think of Houdini as a magician but he’s really an engineer.”

Just as talent is key for most broadcasters today, it also figures prominently in Etkind’s commissioning strategy. “The more US-focused and organic talent you have, the more likely we will commission and the higher we will pay for it.”

Producers also need to ensure programming can work on the main Discovery channel as well. “If a show is just for Science, we will pay less than if it has a larger life on Discovery. If it’s not broad enough to play on the bigger channel, we may not commission it.”

The exec highlights that Discovery is growing its synergy with Scripps brands post-merger, providing Discovery’s iconic Shark Week as one example.

“There was a lot of cross-promotion this year, with Food Network chefs building giant Shark cakes. Similarly, [Scripps’] Travel Channel is going heavily into mystery and space and so are we, so we are both looking at programmes there.”



MIKAEL ÖSTERBY

Head of factual, SVT (Sweden)

Top priorities: readymade true crime, reality, history, science, premium natural history

Sweden’s public broadcaster SVT is actively looking for pitches for its hour-long Sunday primetime slot focused on natural history. Programming must be blue-chip with a sense of humour and elements of science –without being too heavy-handed – and, most importantly, with as few talking heads as possible. Series are best, and SVT prefers pre-buys over co-productions.

“It is important for us to secure long-term VOD rights,” says Österby. “If a filmmaker presents a good

idea, we can put some money towards the show so we get that program and don’t have to wait for it.”

He adds: “We don’t consider ourselves co-producers, but rather co-financiers. However, we are happy to be in communication around editorial.”

The exec says SVT discourages boxsetting programmes, preferring to be innovative with its scheduling. “If it’s ten hours, we will air two hours each consecutive day” rather than making an entire boxset available on catch-up.

Unlike many commissioners, Österby is candid about the challenges of the digital world and finding audiences. “The competition is so much harder,” he says. “We have the biggest channel in Sweden, but if I put something online, no one watches it because they don’t know it exists.” **TBI**



Hot Picks

The top unscripted shows heading to NATPE and Realscreen



Temptation Island (US)

PRODUCER: Banijay Studios North America

DISTRIBUTOR: Banijay Rights

BROADCASTER: USA Network

CONCEPT: Couples face the ultimate test when they are separated into two different 'temptation' islands

Banijay is set to reboot this dating classic for 2019, five years after it last broadcast in the US. This time the 11 x 60'-minute format promises tweaks for the digital age and "new layers of psychological depth".

In case you missed it the first time, the rules of the format dictate that four couples in committed relationships spend 12 days and nights on separate islands, where they are tempted with singles looking for love and wild parties.

Every night the host invites one group to a bonfire where they'll be shown exactly what their partners have been up to. After the twelfth

night the couples are reunited. But, will they go home together – or go their separate ways?

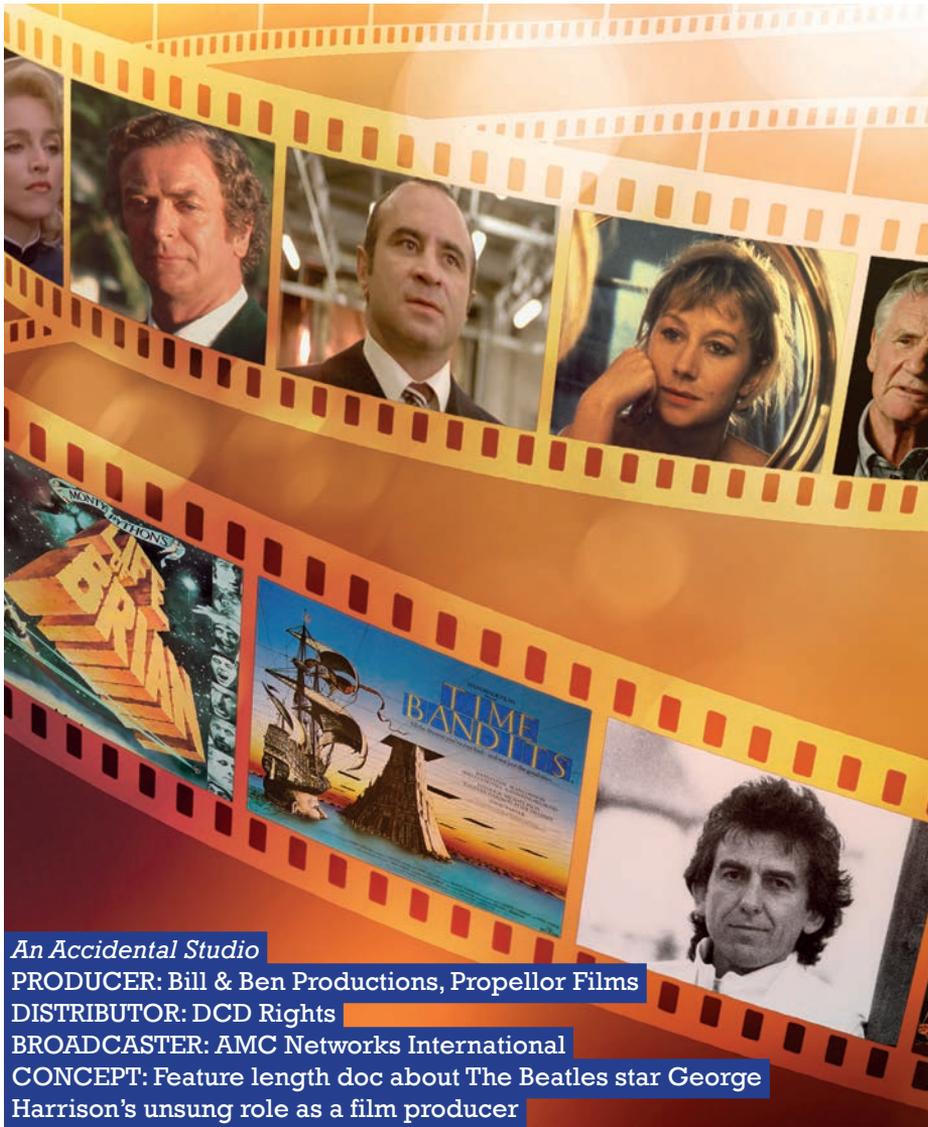
"Banijay Group has had continuing success with the *Temptation Island* format in multiple territories for many years, but the timing felt particularly right to bring the show back in the US," says Andreas Lemos, Banijay's US VP of sales and acquisitions. "The central premise – testing couples who are hitting a rut in their relationship – is universal."

More so than ever, the format is looking to find genuine couples at a crossroads and has looked to cast relatable contenders on the show, according to Lemos.

So far, *Temptation Island* has been adapted in 18 territories since its first launch in 2001. In 2019 there will be new commissions in the US, Germany and the Netherlands.

The US finished tape will launch at NATPE, shortly after its premiere on the USA Network.

"We will also be heavily promoting the *Temptation Island* format for Latin American broadcasters to acquire at NATPE," says Lemos. "There has been a lot of interest in the show with Canadian media group Bell already on board to air the show across E!, SVOD platform Crave, and Canada's largest commercial network, CTV."



An Accidental Studio

PRODUCER: Bill & Ben Productions, Propellor Films
DISTRIBUTOR: DCD Rights
BROADCASTER: AMC Networks International
CONCEPT: Feature length doc about The Beatles star George Harrison's unsung role as a film producer

George Harrison is best known, of course, as one of the Fab Four in The Beatles. Less appreciated, however, is his role as a movie mogul – the backer of classic British movies such as *Life of Brian*, *The Long Good Friday*, *Mona Lisa* and *Withnail and I*.

This feature length documentary tells how ardent *Monty Python* fan Harrison was drawn into the industry by rescuing *Life of Brian* when funding fell apart at the last minute, and how his company, HandMade Films, then went on to dominate the British movie scene with its ethos of making maverick films that everyone else had rejected.

After pursuing separate projects on the story of HandMade Films, producer-directors Bill Jones, Ben Timlett and Kim Leggatt combined forces.

Their documentary features new, exclusive

interviews with the likes of Michael Palin, Terry Gilliam, Richard E. Grant and others in the HandMade story. DCD Rights CEO Nicky Davies Williams says additional effort was made to find previously unseen, unheard interviews with Harrison and others who were important to HandMade's success, like Bob Hoskins. "In this way, the film gives new life to every voice in the story and provides the viewer with something they have never seen before."

The prime territories available to DCD are North America, Japan, Scandinavia and Australia, where Davies Williams says there is a strong affinity for the movies and the star value within the film. "In the UK the film will be released theatrically prior to SVOD and pay cable, so we have all rights to work with and can find the right partners in each individual territory."

Fittest Family

PRODUCER: Kite Entertainment and Animo TV
DISTRIBUTOR: Magnify Media
BROADCASTER: RTE1
CONCEPT: Mega-fit families compete in a series of physical challenges for a cash prize in this warm-hearted, emotional format

Now in its sixth series for RTE1, the *Fittest Family* format is starting to gain traction in the international market. Distributor Magnify Media recently closed the first format license deal for this reality-fitness competition with Chilean network Chilevisión, owned by Turner Latin America, commissioning a local version.

Fittest Family sees 12 mega-fit families compete in a series of physical challenges for a cash prize, mentored by four local sports legends. Magnify Media CEO Andrea Jackson says it's a show that the whole family can watch together, describing it as competitive format that also has great warmth.

"It promotes health and fitness and positive family dynamics, but is also high-sponsorable with all kinds of merchandising and licensing spin-off opportunities."

The format is shot on location - from the coast, to forests, docklands and cityscapes - so it comes with the usual challenges of a moving location shoot. "As a multi-location shoot with big physical games, this is most likely a linear TV proposition and we are looking to sell the format territory by territory to embrace the national identities and characteristics of the families of different countries," says Jackson.

Because *Fittest Family* is a format with "the universal values" of competing to be the best and showing the dynamics of families under pressure, Jackson reckons the format can work everywhere."





The Indiscreet Call
PRODUCER: Mandarinina Productions
DISTRIBUTOR: GoQuest Formats
CONCEPT: A street game show that tests passers-by on facts about their phone contacts

GoQuest's 65 x 35-minute format looks to democratise game shows by questioning passers-by on simple facts about six phone contacts and giving them the opportunity to win €1,000 (\$1,400) in the process.

Playing is easy - the candidate must choose the contacts on their phone and answer a personal question about four of them. Each correct answer makes them richer by hundreds of euros.

Once the participant gives four correct answers, they have the option to put the entire winnings at stake for the bonus question, which could win them the entire €1,000. To do this, one of the two remaining contacts must correctly answer a very personal question about

the participant.

The Indiscreet Call does not look for knowledge in history, literature, culture or sport, but rather focuses on general trivia about the contestant's best friends, according to Jimmy George, VP of sales and acquisitions at GoQuest Media Ventures.

"We wanted a show that is fun and different from the regular quiz format," he says. "We think we know people close to us better than they know themselves, but this is not always the case. It's where the surprise element kicks in."

The format will be arriving at NATPE Miami in January. George says *The Indiscreet Call* "is economic and easy to produce" making it an ideal international format.

Dating Detectives
PRODUCER: Zig Zag, IMTV
DISTRIBUTOR: BBC Studios
Distribution
CONCEPT: A mash-up of dating and crime procedural shows



Dating Detectives is, as its title suggests, a format that mashes up elements of dating and detective shows. Real-life detectives are drafted in to help singletons find their ideal partner, using their investigation techniques (forensics, interrogation, psychological profiling etc.) to test daters' inherent goodness, which is all shown through hidden camera filming. Based on the detectives' findings, the potential dates are then whittled down to one person - who is then matched up with the contestant.

So far, so straightforward. What's more complex is the genesis of the show, which has been co-developed by the UK's Zig Zag Productions and South Korea's IMTV, with both a Korean and English-language broadcast pilot produced.

Zig Zag managing director Matt Graff explains: "We decided to shoot the English-language pilot in South Korea on the back of the Korean pilot shoot. The biggest challenge was casting. The pool of potential detectives and daters was much smaller than we are used to but we worked closely with the team at IMTV and engaged a good local casting agency, and many Skype calls later, we got there in the end."

IMTV produced the South Korean version for broadcast on CJ ENM's general entertainment channel tvN.

BBC Studios Distribution co-funded development and holds worldwide distribution rights to the format in all territories except the UK and South Korea. Graff says that IMTV is positioned as producer in South Korea, Zig Zag in the UK and US, and CJ ENM has the right of first refusal to produce in a handful of Asian territories where they have a strong presence. Says Graff: "I think the show could be skewed to any number of networks, linear or digital, from youth skewing and general entertainment channels to true crime genre."

Training Teachers to Kill
PRODUCER: Sundog Pictures
DISTRIBUTOR: Silverlining Rights
BROADCASTER: Channel 4 (UK)
CONCEPT: Doc following one Ohio school which has taken up Trump's suggestion to arm teachers



Training Teachers to Kill follows the heated debate taking place in school boards around the US on whether teachers should be trained to handle armed weapons to protect pupils during mass shootings.

The debate kicked off as a suggestion from President Donald Trump after the February 2018 Parkland massacre and has since been put into action at FASTER - a summer school where high school teachers are trained to use guns.

Directed by Kira Phillips (*My Baby's Life: Who Decides*), the one-hour doc has unprecedented access into a microcosm of a much wider debate that may have repercussions around the world.

"Not only does the film show the FASTER training in Ohio where teachers are taught how to shoot and kill, but it also tells the story of the battle to arm two schools - one of which has actually had a school shooting," says Katie Buchanan, creative director at Sundog.

"Despite this fact, the victim and his father are both campaigning against the plan to arm teachers in their school and this is the first time they have talked publicly to the media."

Silverlining Rights has already been actively pre-selling the doc and secured deals in Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia and Benelux.

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Mr. Nelson On The North Side

PRODUCER: Dan D'Or,

Michael J. Kirk

DISTRIBUTOR: Kew Media

Distribution

CONCEPT: Everyone knows the name Prince, few knew the man. *Mr. Nelson On The North Side* uncovers the person behind the hype

Nearly three years since he died, Prince remains a subject of huge fascination. Ava Du Vernay (*Selma*, *13th*) is, for example, helming a documentary about the life of Prince for Netflix. This documentary feature, however, focuses on his formative years, charting the journey to the top for the shy kid from a broken home in North Minneapolis. In particular, it examines how Prince found security and encouragement at a local community centre called *The Way*.

"This film explores the man behind the hype – never has a film about Prince included the childhood influences in his life that helped create the genius that he was," says director and producer Michael J. Kirk and producer Daniel D'Or, who cite exclusive interviews from key people that helped raise and



encourage Prince. These include the director of *The Way* and community activist Spike Moss, as well as Chaka Khan, Chuck D and Macy Gray.

One of the biggest challenges in producing the film itself is Prince himself. "A vast majority of archives and music are very controlled, as that is how he wanted it while he was here on the earth and continues to ring true even after his passing." So they have "dug deep to find crucial material and an untold story" about

Prince.

Kew Media Distribution's EVP of sales Jonathan Ford thinks the documentary will appeal worldwide. "Prince was - and remains - a global phenomenon," says Ford. "We expect the film to sell to linear channels initially as there is already a lot of interest from both pay and free TV from local territories. But with a star such as Prince we are sure the film would also work on SVOD. We can even see theatrical potential!"



Dead Man's Line

PRODUCER: Alan Berry

DISTRIBUTOR: Scorpion TV

CONCEPT: A gripping documentary about a high-profile US kidnapping case from 1977

Dead Man's Line looks well placed to help meet high broadcaster and streamer demand for feature length, true crime documentaries. It's the story of a shocking kidnapping that gripped the US in 1977, when Tony Kiritsis, who had fallen behind on mortgage payments, took Indianapolis mortgage broker Dick Hall hostage

by wiring a sawed-off shotgun to his head and holding him prisoner while the drama played out on national radio and television. Kiritsis's case also triggered changes in US law around using insanity as a defence.

Dead Man's Line is also something of a personal story for producer Alan Berry – the case happened in his hometown during his childhood. What really sets it apart from most crime docs, says David Cornwall, MD of Scorpion TV, is that all of Kiritsis's crime was caught on camera or audio.

"Scorpion TV is hoping to ride the wave of interest in true crime documentaries worldwide," he says. "This unique and very visual film gets inside the mind of a criminal like no other."

Scorpion boarded the doc after it attracted buzz on the festival circuit and in the US press. *Dead Man's Line* is an independent production with no broadcaster attached. As such, Cornwall reckons it would work well on either a traditional or OTT platform. "It would be easy for broadcasters to attract a linear audience to the film and specialty VOD viewers will be drawn to the film by its unique nature."



When I Grow Up
PRODUCER: Optomen UK
DISTRIBUTOR: All3Media International
BROADCASTER: Channel 4 (UK)
CONCEPT: What happens when you allow a group of 7 to 9 year old kids to take over your company for a week?

Shows where kids take centre stage are extremely popular the world over, and *When I Grow Up* is a clever take on this sub-genre. It takes a group of 7 to 9 year old kids from a wide range of backgrounds and puts them in a charge of part of a company

– from a celebrity magazine to a chocolate factory - for a week under the watchful eye of the bosses. But this format, from the producers of *Employable Me*, is as much a study of social skills and social mobility as it is about cute kids. “The show was in

conversation with Channel 4 for a year - we both wanted to make something magical but meaningful about kids becoming adults and how through this, we could see the influence of background,” says Optomen UK’s joint CEO Nick Hornby.

Hornby says the biggest challenge making the show is producing enough content in very short filming windows over a limited number of days because of UK regulator Ofcom’s guidelines on filming with children, and the limited availability of the businesses. “The films are shot in six days, with between three and four hours filming per day, so we had to make sure that we stuck to a very rigid schedule and that everything was in place to allow the kids to do their jobs as well as they could.”

All3Media’s SVP of format production Nick Smith says he expects the show to travel all around the world, both as a UK tape and adaptations of the format. “The show is broad and so will work best on mainstream broadcasters. Although aimed at an adult audience, I’m sure that younger viewers will also enjoy watching.”

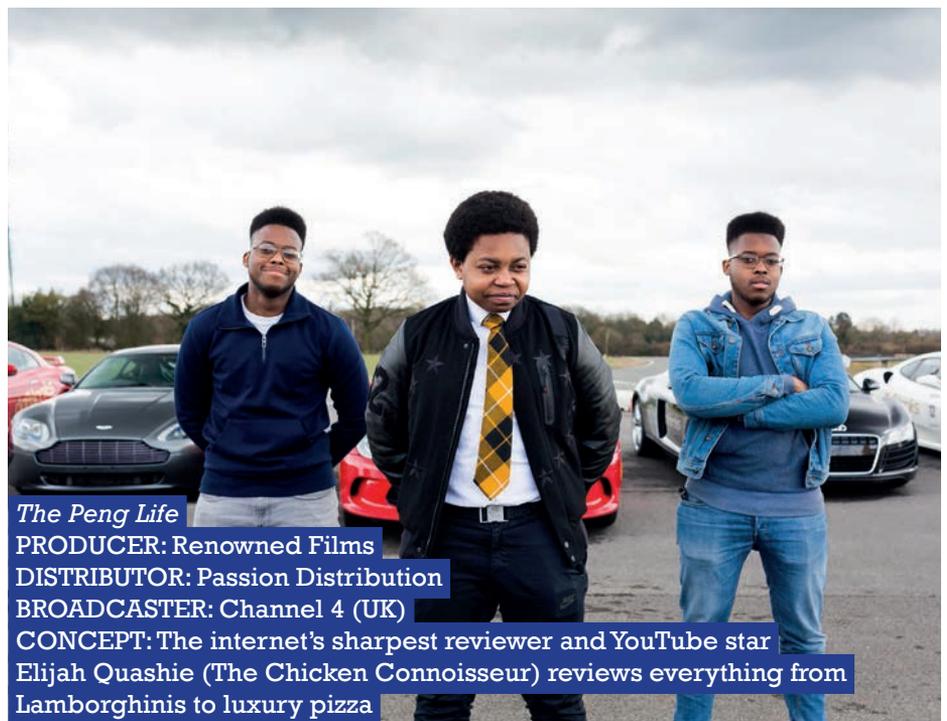
Renowned Films’ latest format brings Elijah Quashie, and his 600,000 YouTube followers, to review a range of luxury items with the aid of his sidekicks Nelson and Wilson.

The Peng Life is an extension of Quashie’s antics on his digital show *The Pengest Munch*, which went viral due to his tongue-in-cheek reviews of London chicken shops. In the new format the reviewer looks at expensive haircuts, watches and sports cars around the UK.

So far, the YouTube sensation has also been joined by stars such as British fashion model Jodie Kidd and UK gameshow host Rachel Riley.

The format is also about to become all the more international, with a second series that will take Quashie and his friends worldwide to review the most ludicrously expensive items they can find.

“The first series was shot in the UK, but the incredible items reviewed in Elijah’s no nonsense and witty way certainly translates across markets. So much so that the second series will see *Peng Life* travel across the globe to review the world’s most eye-wateringly expensive and ‘pengest’ items,” says Renowned co-founder and executive



The Peng Life
PRODUCER: Renowned Films
DISTRIBUTOR: Passion Distribution
BROADCASTER: Channel 4 (UK)
CONCEPT: The internet’s sharpest reviewer and YouTube star Elijah Quashie (*The Chicken Connoisseur*) reviews everything from Lamborghinis to luxury pizza

producer Duane Jones.

“We knew this review format could work beyond the cheap local takeaways of *Pengest Munch*, and knew the concept of taking

Elijah and his team out of this setting and catapulting them into the luxury market would create a fresh, witty review show that would appeal to youth audiences.” **TBI**

LAST WORD



JON OSSOFF

Nevermind blockchain, fund public media

There is a popular refrain about the news today: the public is misinformed and divided by cynical partisan content, and manipulated and surveilled by Silicon Valley spyware. Local journalism is dying. Walter Cronkite is dead along with everything that he stood for.

Long gone is the vaunted “common set of facts” — the authoritative public worldview, established daily by a few major broadcasters and publications, whose legitimacy crossed demographic and partisan lines.

Amidst nostalgia for that “Cronkite era”, there is scant critical assessment of how well the public really was served by editorial and ideological homogeny. But whatever the flaws of the old regime — when a few great newsrooms and broadcasting houses dominated information — our new Zuckerberg-Murdoch era presents a genuine crisis for media and democracies.

This crisis in journalism has provoked a lot of fashionable new ideas, few of which have panned out. But there is at least one straightforward solution, and it’s an old one: invest more public funds in independent, public-interest journalism.

For democracies to function, citizens need ready access to superb journalism produced

for accuracy and relevance rather than sensation, partisanship and profit.

Courageous video journalism has a track record of informing and influencing public opinion at critical moments. Our television and film industry has been relied upon to produce it. But these days, money is pouring into ratings-driven TV and streaming content, partisan sensationalism on cable and highfalutin festival docs. There is scarce corporate interest in hard-hitting reporting and investigation.

Liberal optimists looked to technology for solutions, but those aspirations have been demolished. Social media platforms were praised for their transformative openness at a decade of #futureofnews conferences, and yet those same platforms have revealed themselves to be rapacious, deceitful and easily manipulated.

And with a few exceptions, the trendy new media ventures once hyped as rescuers of journalism are struggling, constraining their own appeal to narrow audiences, or becoming properties of the same corporate empires that serve us worthless cable news.

The challenges to democratic civilisation are huge and immediate. Public institutions are rotten with corruption. Governments and a few corporations amass greater power

over our lives. The economy is fragile and unsustainable. We continue to destroy the natural environment. Our political leaders are liars, incompetents and demagogues.

Times like these demand a powerful, independent and aggressive press — a press worthy of fear by those who lie, cheat, steal and kill.

That means we desperately need hard-hitting, brilliantly made news and current affairs programming. But how will we fund it?

Forget about the blockchain, micropayments, crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and whatever else is pitched at the next conference. Right now — and it is urgent — publicly funded, editorially independent, public-interest journalism is the most obvious solution.

Despite its flaws, the BBC remains the most reputable newsgathering institution in the world. Yet it stands alone. Why can’t American public media equally be a force to be reckoned with?

PBS, NPR, the BBC and other public media yet to be established can be among our greatest assets. They are also likely to remain under attack, because a well-funded, independent press threatens the corrupt, the dishonest and the powerful.

As a matter of urgency, the US Congress — and, dare I suggest, parliaments and governments around the world — should dramatically increase funding for public media and reinforce guarantees of their editorial independence. **TBI**

*Jon Ossoff is the CEO and Managing Director of Insight TWI Ltd., the Emmy, Peabody and BAFTA award-winning producer of Africa Eye’s *Betraying the Game*. In 2017, Ossoff was the Democratic nominee for US Congress in the historic special election for Georgia’s Sixth Congressional District.*

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