

# TBI Television Business International

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A MAKE OR BREAK COMPETITION

# LEGO MASTERS



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## Editor's note Richard Middleton

# Unpredictable opportunities

**T**elevision is by its nature an unpredictable industry - there is, after all, no accounting for taste, as many an exec will have thought as their surefire hit turned out to be slightly less popular with the paying public before it disappeared into cancelled oblivion.

Even so, almost two years down the line from the first emergence of Covid - even typing that sentence, it seems barely believable it's been going on so long - and the pandemic continues to jab at the normal rhythms of the industry and cause disruption around the world. Yet the business is proving remarkably resilient, with producers finding workarounds and new, unlikely opportunities emerging.

Take natural history programming, for example. This blue chip genre has been going through something of an evolution recently, with new commissioners, technological developments and, frankly, cheaper cameras opening it up to new entrants on all sides. The pandemic, and its associated impact on travel, has also meant local crews and talent already on the ground - who were once perhaps ignored in favour of the tried and trusted - have been more deeply engaged. As we find out on page 16, it could be about to provide an opportunity for new perspectives to emerge.

In this packed edition we also hear from Globoplay's Ana Carolina Lima (page 8) about her changing perspective as parent Globo looks to entice viewers in the huge and fascinating Brazilian streaming market. We take a trip to Portugal to find out why it's being tipped to become a hotbed for drama (page 14) and also unpick how producers can make the most of financial support to get their shows - and companies - ahead (page 10).

There's also a deep dive into the world of mockumentaries (page 24) as we explore if a new wave of shows could be about to join classic stalwarts such as *The Office*; we hear from a myriad of buyers about their requirements (page 28); and we have the first instalment of Siobhan Crawford's new monthly column, which gets behind the headlines and into the nitty gritty of the formats business. First up, how to pick a distributor - enjoy!

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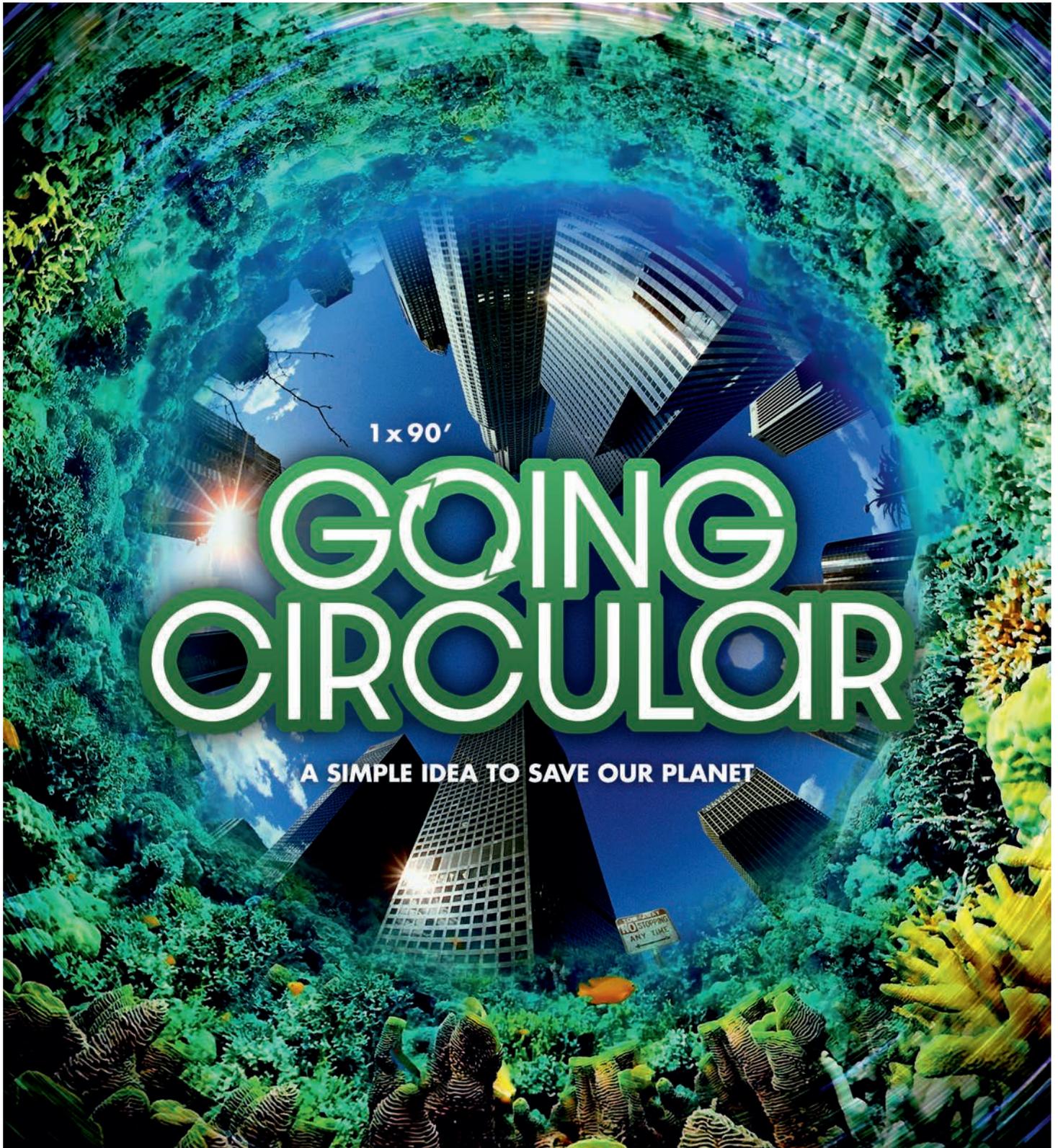
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Meet us at NATPE Miami!



## Opinion Siobhan Crawford

# Who cares about your content?

**In the first instalment of a monthly column focused on the world of formats, Siobhan Crawford discusses how to pick a reliable distributor**

**A**t a time when original formats are needed more than ever, we have a deluge of derivatives filling our inboxes and recommissions filling our screens.

So one exasperated day I asked myself, who actually cares about content? Are our actions reflecting that we actually care about the content or is it just business? Each month, I'll be shifting my focus to one group in our industry and asking, who really cares?

Let's start with distributors – most of us are delightful. Truly. We are friends who rarely feel competition between our companies (except when commissions are announced and we believe our show was better). We all have different DNA and specialities. However, we are also not all 'good' people for your content journey.

There are plenty of people we need to 'choose' on our path to a commission and distributors usually come at the start of this journey. You must align yourself with good (content) people if you want to progress but also be informed, protected and perfected!

There can be too many sacrifices and mistakes when choosing distributors and that is because some have fallen firmly on the business side of caring. Strategic and commercial reasoning prevails over wanting to help and guide the format creators with good basic ideas that need too much TLC.

The people who care will guide you through the commercial negotiations, making you aware of industry standards and avoiding pitfalls like revenue share, loss of IP, high distribution fees, packaging costs, excessive options and inappropriate partners. Let's be clear, 30% total or 25% +5% is the most you want to agree for distribution fees and no, you don't pay for 1/6th of the distributor's MIPTV stand!

Say no to five-year terms and exclusive distribution deals. Say yes to exclude territories if you have ongoing negotiations or to agree a lower distribution fee if the distributor ends up closing a deal with the same client you spoke with. Ask distributors for their strategy, don't get distracted by advances and remember the experience of working with them. Life is nothing if not a lesson.

Siobhan Crawford has worked in the format business for almost two decades at firms including DRG, Zodiak and Banijay. She is currently head of sales and acquisitions at Benelux-based format distributor Primitives

## Money vs love

I have never paid an advance on content. Ever. What I have offered is my honest opinion, managed expectations and committed to love your content like I love my son.

The international groups may offer you a five-figure advance (and yes, I know the value of money) and then your format launches and ratings are OK, the groups have 10,000 internal formats and after a year you are still waiting for your first sale. You become disheartened. I do not know what you were expecting? I am not opposed to the big groups, I just believe they have limits.

Media Ranch, Magnify Media, Primitives, Line-up Industries, pick a name and I promise you these superstars work harder for you than a group. It is not rocket science. They have to. They actively acquire third-party formats worldwide as their own pipelines are not guaranteed and they are independents that mostly don't have local prodcos in territories – but they are also hustlers and, importantly, format experts that can help tweak IP for international, position it correctly against, and identify, competition, and cherry pick partners for you based on compatible companies' DNA.

## Make them work for it

How a distributor works on your behalf is important. So you need to remember:

- If you are going to get in bed with a distributor, talk to another distributor friend beforehand to see if there is anything clever you can do to the contractual terms
- Investigate how many formats a distributor takes to market. Large internal catalogues and exclusive catalogue deals spread companies too thin
- Ask what the strategy is for the content – is your distributor going to ask for £5k (\$7k) for an option to a paper format in the UK and end up putting good people off?

There are 'good' people who will care almost as much as you, but you need to ask around. **TBI**

## About Town

### Getting down to business

While the Omicron variant returned international travel plans to a precarious state ahead of the Christmas holidays, the TBI team still found time to get out of the office for a little winter sunshine and headed abroad to the warmer climes of Gran Canaria for this year's Cartoon Business.

More than 100 delegates from far and wide attended the event in Las Palmas in early December, in which attendees pondered the current state of the animation industry and what the future may hold.

TBI deputy editor Mark Layton was in attendance and delivered one of the presentations (you can read some of his findings on pages 20-22) in a two-day event that also included insight from European broadcasters TF1, RTVE and SWR/ARD, as well as companies ranging from Anima Kitchent and Wildbrain Spark to TeamTO, Gaumont and Sesame Workshop.

Pleasant weather, wine, food and the occasional demonstration of 'Bosnian Tango' added cheer to an intimate event that tackled topics ranging from the growing power of YouTube to the changing role of linear.



### Catching up in London

It wasn't just winter sun that About Town made time for in December, however. When news from the US landed that *Knight Rider* and *Baywatch* star - and all-round American hero - David Hasselhoff was on his way to London, it was clearly time to make room in the schedule.

The Hoff was in town to promote his latest series, *Ze Network*, in which he plays a version of himself, with the story revolving around an international conspiracy involving former Cold War assassins. Produced for RTL Group's TV Now streamer in Germany, the show is the first to emerge from CBS Studios' first-look pact with Berlin-based Syrreal Entertainment.

Hasselhoff was joined in London by *Tehran* creator Alon Aranya (both pictured) and other show execs from *Bestseller Boy*, which is also from CBS Studios.



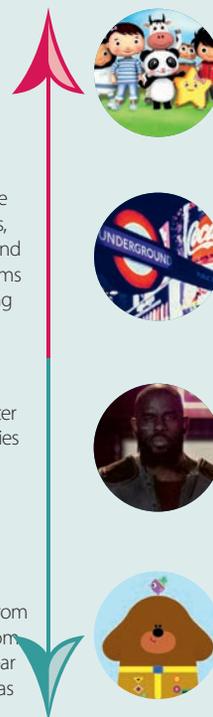
### Swings and Roundabouts

**3** Moonbug Entertainment inked a \$3bn deal with Disney execs Kevin Mayer and Tom Staggs' investment outfit, which acquired the *CoComelon* and *Little Baby Bum* IP rights holder in November

**7** Studiocanal, Beyond Rights, Blue Ant International, Cineflix Rights, DCD Rights, Hat Trick International and Passion Distribution are the latest firms to formally join the rapidly expanding London TV Screenings in February

**6** Netflix axed the live-action adaptation of *Cowboy Bebop* after just one season, despite the sci-fi series being the sixth-most watched show on the streamer in the week that it launched - with 21,630,000 viewers

**65** UK animation production supported by tax reliefs declined to £65.3m in 2019, down from £84.5m in 2018. It was also down from the £79.9m recorded in 2013, the year in which the Animation Tax Relief was introduced





## Diversity Deborah Williams

### Snowball effect

**Deborah Williams looks at how the pandemic has made some events more accessible and urges the industry to maintain momentum**

**I**t's that time of year where I sit down and reflect on another 12 months of pushing for greater diversity across our industry.

Outwardly, 2021 was another year of high-profile commitments from platforms, broadcasters and producers in the UK and globally – but the reality is the jury is still out. We're still looking for some meat on the bones and to have a better idea of the impact that all these commitments are having.

So that means planning for another year of analysis of new data sets, starting with the Creative Diversity Network's (CDN) own fifth annual Diamond data report, due in February. It may well indicate not only the most recent impact of COVID-19 on UK television production, but also provide a further amount of longitudinal analysis of any progress, or regression.

Looking back on last year, one positive in a difficult 12 months was the opportunity to work with the Edinburgh International Television Festival. As the official accessibility partner, we were able to deliver much greater provision for deaf and disabled people to access the full range of festival content. This included British Sign Language interpretation and live captioning for all 60 sessions that took place online. I was heartened to receive many messages and calls from people around the world who were watching it saying, 'thank you – for the first time I can access the festival'.

Disability was a central theme of the entire festival, beginning with writer Jack Thorne's MacTaggart, which provided an eye-opening – and soul-searching – picture of how disabled people are represented within the UK TV industry.

While many festivals in 2021 remained online, it was fantastic to see events restarting in person, such as Series Mania, where we were invited to present a session about Diamond. Looking forward, I am excited about the return of events such as Realscreen, NATPE Miami, Berlin, MIPTV and Edinburgh, amongst others.

But what does this return to normality look like

in terms of accessibility and inclusivity? What does it mean for the many talented deaf and disabled creators and producers of content, as well as those of us working in the policy space trying to address and remove systemic and structural barriers?

Well – for me, a lot of work! I will be collaborating with other specialists and experts to bring the model that we piloted this year into fruition for other events. Imagine what it would be like to attend any of these global events and be unable to access the content, to network or to pitch, to know what the world is looking for in unscripted or high-end TV dramas. Imagine what that must feel like and then think about what you would need to have in place to fully participate.

Many people have been able to work remotely through the pandemic, changing their working patterns and fitting in more care responsibilities. Globally, reasonable adjustments have been put in place as non-disabled people have been enlightened by realising how flexible working can function for this industry. These need to stay.

Disabled and deaf people have long been asking for this flexibility but have usually been told it was impossible. But now the risk is that rather than empowering diverse talent, these new ways of working will simply be the preserve of non-disabled people while disabled people continue to be shut out. That must not happen and cannot happen.

So, what can you do? Simple, small actions like paying for disabled people to attend festivals, or at least providing reduced or complimentary passes. Subtitle content that is shared and shown at sessions, and make sure any event you organise is properly accessible and inclusive by asking for disabled people's input as you plan them. Easy, basic stuff, which when added together can have a real structural impact.

Optimistically, I have to think that the dawn of disability inclusion has started in our industry. It is on the rise and it is not going to stop. It is the future of global television and the future we all deserve. **TBI**

Deborah is executive director at the UK's Creative Diversity Network and has worked in arts, culture and the creative industries for more than three decades



# SCREW

6 x 60'

A PRISON DRAMA LIKE NO OTHER

BY BAFTA NOMINATED WRITER ROB WILLIAMS  
(*THE VICTIM, KILLING EVE*)



# Dancing to a new beat

Globo remains a giant in Latin America, but deep-pocketed US-based streamers are ramping up the pressure. Ana Carolina Lima tells Richard Middleton how the Brazilian company's Globoplay service is adapting to changing viewing habits



**G**lobo tends to dominate the airwaves when it comes to discussing the Brazilian TV industry and it's been that way for several decades. Yet when it comes to streaming, it's a rather different matter.

The country of nearly 215 million people has long been a lynchpin in the Latin American content market and while the Brazilian Portuguese-language sets its shows apart from others in the region, the sheer heft of all those potential viewers has long made it a go-to destination for global operators seeking a scale play.

Despite this, Globo has remained a sprawling player across the country's free-to-air and pay-TV landscape but there are now pressures building like never before.

## US incursions

Much of the competition is coming from the US giants. YouTube is hugely popular with local youngsters seeking cost-effective AVOD content they can watch on phones, while the extent of Netflix's growth means Brazil is now its second biggest market with around 18 million subscribers. Only the US represents more subscribers on a per country basis for the world's biggest streamer, underlining the fight that Globo has on its hands.

The answer to engaging all those eager streamers for the Brazilian firm comes in the form of Globoplay, which launched in 2015 and now claims in excess of 30 million subscribers across its SVOD and ad-supported offerings.

It allows on demand access to shows from the group's linear networks, as well acting as a portal to other streamers via a 'channels service' and even offers a 'podcast hub' – but the focus of late from a content perspective has been on originals.

Marking this shift in emphasis, Globoplay recently ordered its first telenovela with *Hidden Truths II*, but head of content, Ana Carolina Lima, tells TBI there are extensive plans to continue to expand both domestic originals and international programming partnerships.

"We know that what makes us stand out is Brazilian content and investment in original productions," says Lima, adding that there are more than 30 releases already projected for 2022, primarily focused on documentary and drama.



**“We know that what makes us stand out is Brazilian content and investment in original productions”**

Ana Carolina Lima, Globoplay

Other originals include true crime show *O Caso Evandro* (*The Evandro Case*) and *Onde Está Meu Coração* (*Where Is My Heart*). Lima, like many content chiefs in charge of domestic or regional streamers, says she wants programming that “relates and makes people identify with our culture, talents and storytelling.”

*Hidden Truths II* (opposite), *Anne Boleyn* (below) and *Onde Está Meu Coração* (bottom) are among Globoplay’s originals and international acquisitions



“The ‘Brazilianess’ ingredient is always imperative in our productions, but without losing sight of the experimentation possibility that streaming allows,” she adds.

New seasons of Amazon-set *Aruanas* and supernatural drama *Unsouled* have also been in the works, both emerging from the company’s in-house Globo Studios division, and while the focus is drama, Lima says Globoplay is also making “substantial” investments in the documentary space, too.

“We also have a partnership with Globo’s sports and journalism divisions for content production, but we still work with the independent market,” Lima continues, pointing to *Rota 66 – A História da Polícia Que Mata*, based on the book by Caco Barcellos. There are also new seasons of *Dissident Archangel*, which is being shot, and shows such as *Anti-Kidnapping Unit*.

### Rights, partnerships & acquisitions

For producers, the financing and rights models can vary, largely depending on whether the show in question is a drama series, a movie or a telenovela – but the intention for Globo is to retain as many rights as possible. “There are different models of operation that are directly related to financial investment by the concerned parties,” Lima adds.

The content chief is also keen to embrace international co-productions and she has been active in acquisitions too, recently picking up shows as varied as Russian drama *Gold Diggers*, Austrian series *Sisi* and UK drama *Anne Boleyn*. Those pickups followed deals for series such as *Why Women Kill* and *Killing Eve*, and more are on the way.

The focus, however, is to offer viewers a slate of shows that engage Globo’s domestic audience, no matter where they might be in the world. The streamer is already available in the US and in September Globo confirmed plans to expand further, with launches in Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the UK, taking its reach to more than 20 countries.

“Since some of those Brazilian expats have multicultural families who want to watch Globoplay content, our intention is to offer more subtitled content, focused on families of Brazilians living abroad,” Lima says.

“We also have the series *Rio Connection* in production, partially in English, developed in a partnership with Sony and [Sony Pictures Television-owned Brazilian firm] Floresta,” she adds. “Our intention is to stay on this path, expanding the possibilities of co-productions and of having more of a local view.” **TBI**

# Risk & rewards

Scripted costs have surged over recent years, with streamers' demands supercharging the market. Nick Edwards explores how indies can use financial support to leverage their shows – and their companies – into the big league

**D**uring a global pandemic, it is little surprise that demand for drama has soared. And, with so much scripted being made, it is the voices of the most talented writers and directors who cut through the deluge. Yet the high production values audiences now expect mean getting a vision onto screen is financially riskier than ever before.

Increasing demand is pushing up rates in development, production and post-production. Indeed, before you even get started writing, costs have the potential to be substantial.

“A big book may cost €500,000 (\$560,000), then you have to pay a good writer,” says Marco Chimenz, MD of ITV Studios-backed Cattleya, the Italian production house behind international hits such as *Gomorrah* and *ZeroZeroZero*.

“You then may need to pay them to go around the world scouting to understand what happens on the ground,” he adds. “You can easily go into hundreds of thousands of Euros.”

For those without a studio or backer, this presents a problem. “An indie doesn't have £15m (\$20m) in its bank to cash flow a production upfront, they need to look for solutions,” says Kate Bennetts, MD of Ringside Studios, the recently launched London-based production company founded by Channel 4's former head of drama, Gub Neal, which is backed by France's Newen Group.

## Navigating finance

Against this background, a lucrative and ever-more sophisticated microeconomy has grown up around the premium scripted sector. For some, the answer might lie in wealthy, private individuals, many of whom used to invest in independent film but are now increasingly turning to series.

This group, sometimes accused of being attracted by the glamour of meeting celebs and attending premieres, might be on the increase but they remain a minority – making eight hours of screen entertainment is very

*ZeroZeroZero*, which is made by Cattleya, faced numerous production challenges, even with strong backers on board



high risk, even in comparison to the already high-risk proposition of making a two-hour film.

More conventionally, there are banks that will lend on a project-by-project basis and private equity (PE) investment is also a well-established presence in the industry – recent examples include the Mediawan Alliance buying *Doctor Foster* prodco Drama Republic. Although PE has deep pockets, most of the bigger groups – from Sony Pictures Television (SPT) to All3Media and Mediawan – can afford to pay more as they benefit from a wide range of synergies, particularly on the distribution front.

For UK-based Eleven, the production house behind Netflix's *Sex Education*, the partner of choice was Sony.

“They are very focused on getting shows into



production, something they can do in a very agile way,” says Jamie Campbell, who is Eleven’s co-founder with Joel Wilson. “Their energy is not devoted to making things in a bespoke way for their own platform or broadcasting arm, as they don’t have one. When you go into the marketplace, you want to be as unfettered as possible and to keep the maximum number of options open.”

### **Considerations & complexities**

For producers such as Eleven, there are various considerations when choosing which company to partner with. In addition to the obvious – namely, how much the interested party wants to pay – you are also going to have to work with this new partner for several

**\$560,000**

The price to the rights  
of a “big book”

years, so who is going to best assist in growing the business?

For a small indie dealing with a huge streamer, the option of having a muscular partner in your corner can also be worth its weight in gold.

“They can step in and say, ‘Look, I know they offered you a 10% increase in the premium on the next season of your show but in our experience a show of that calibre commands a 50% increase,’” says Tom Manwaring, MD of Helion Partners, which advises owners and managers (who are often also the founders) of independent production houses on the sale of their companies, as he did for Eleven.

At this point, it’s also worth reflecting on the path that gets a production company to the point of being sold. In the late 1990s, Eleven’s Campbell left The



London Film School and Wilson left his job at a production company to make documentaries.

They created, shot and often appeared in their own work. After breaking into scripted with *Cast Offs*, written by Jack Thorne, they soon had around 10-15 shows in development each year.

“The outside perception is that if you’re making stuff, particularly if you’re in it, you’re making an exorbitant amount of money. But the truth was, in our case, we just weren’t,” says Campbell. They subsidised their income by making advertisements but even then “we were working from our kitchen tables,” he continues. They first sold a stake in Eleven to Channel 4’s Indie Growth Fund in 2014. Then, as now, the logic underpinning their growth was; “How do we maximise the chance of getting something greenlit,” says Campbell.

## Enquiring investors

The investor, on the other hand, is considering “what kind of relationships do the production company have with the content commissioners,” says Manwaring, who has also worked with Silverback Films, The Agency, Red Planet and Drama Republic.

“Do they have returning series? Do they have a strong development slate? What IP do they hold? Do they have a team or are they entirely driven by one individual?” he says. Indies that can say yes to most of those questions have the pick of the bunch when it comes to investors, Manwaring adds.

So how does a sale come about? During the months beforehand, a model is created that reflects what the production company might hope to achieve over a five- or six-year period. They then establish which the

*Liaison* hails from UK-based Ringside and is made in partnership with Newen

**“If you want to break new ground and be ambitious you are in a more dangerous zone, no doubt”**

Marco Chimenz,  
Cattleya



most likely buyers are and which would be the best fit.

Prospective buyers are approached and, if interested, sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), then meet with the owners. Typically, this process takes around six months and involves the sale of a majority stake in the company followed by an ‘earn out’ period that normally runs over five years.

At the end of this period, the rest of the shares can then be sold – hopefully now worth more than when the process began. The ‘earn out’ also includes various clauses and protections so that the buyer does not have creative control of any shows, nor can it come in and manage the business.

As well as having a direct equity stake in Ringside, Newen is also working with them to create a portfolio of investments into other UK-based production companies. As a French company, Newen is in a strong position to invest directly in continental Europe but they were keen to get into the UK market.

“The UK really is its own market and a huge driving force worldwide,” says Bennetts. “Newen wanted to be closer to the action on the ground in the UK and to be able to establish where the next bit of exciting IP is coming from, which is key to how we at Ringside are collaborating with them.”

Ringside’s first venture is *Liaison*, an Anglo-French production for Apple TV+, starring Eva Green and Vincent Cassel. It has the distinctive hallmark of Neal’s previous work such as *Prime Suspect*, *Queer As Folk* and *The Fall*.

“Though high-end scripted is very expensive and slow to make, it travels and weathers well. *The Fall* was made eight years ago in the UK but when it aired on Netflix in the summer of 2020 it was one of the best performing shows and it didn’t look dated at all,” says Bennetts.

However, even with strong backers on board, a producer’s sleepless nights are far from over. On a multi-location shoot such as *ZeroZeroZero* – shot in Italy, Morocco and Mexico, amongst others – the nature of production threw up its own challenges. “We were promised but then denied permits to shoot and had to stop production for one month,” remembers Chimenz. “This had a domino effect that created a lot of problems that cost a lot of money.”

Yet for the Cattleya exec, who is currently producing a remake of the cult series *This Is Us* for Rai Fiction, it underlined the fickle nature of scripted production.

“Even though we had just become part of ITV studios they were very understanding and there was no finger pointing. We reconfigured some agreements but they didn’t just step in and fill the gap, that falls on you. If you want to break new ground and be ambitious you are in a more dangerous zone, no doubt.” **TBI**



# JANET.

OVER 5 YEARS IN THE MAKING

UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO A MUSIC ICON

4 x 60' DOCUMENTARY SERIES



Banijay  
Rights



# Unpacking Portugal's 'silver' age

From tax breaks to co-pros and burgeoning Atlantic alliances, Portugal's drama business looks set to boom. Nick Edwards headed to Lisbon's inaugural TV festival late last year and offers these five key takeaways

Portugal's proximity to Spain means the country has seen first-hand how quickly local drama can become a global phenomenon. OnSeries Lisboa, which took place in November 2021, now intends to put the Portuguese scripted industry into a similar league as its more established European neighbours – and there are a variety of reasons why the prospects of doing this look good.

## Booster-ism

Portugal's scripted output is largely built on well-made telenovelas, but the momentum accelerated when, in 2015, public service broadcaster RTP started investing in series. Production in Portugal from 2022 will be incentivised with a 30% cash rebate and the industry will also benefit from an upcoming tax of 1% on profits made by streaming services (to be paid back into the Film and Audiovisual institute). Next year will also see legislation to ensure that streamers have to invest 4% into productions made in Portugal. The next step is “for the audiovisual sector to be marketed to the rest of the world,” says culture secretary Nuno Artur Silva.

## Calling all co-pros

In some senses, the major barriers for Portugal are only notional; almost all high-end shows from larger European countries are already the result of co-productions, co-financing and/or sophisticated international distribution deals. Seeing this opportunity, innovative local prodco SPi is currently making *Cold Haven* with RTP and Iceland's RUV, as well



The inaugural OnSeries Lisboa intends to put Portugal, and particularly the benefits of producing drama in the country, on the international map

as upcoming *Gama*, a co-pro with Brazil's Boutique films. With RTP on board as a minority partner, SPi is also behind *Glória*, Portugal's first Netflix original (that dropped in November) – a rite of passage for any country stepping into the major league.

## Atlantic alliances

Portuguese being the spoken language of both Portugal and Brazil is another strategic advantage for the industry. Brazil is not only a country of over 200 million people but it is also Netflix's second largest territory (outside of the US). Though the two countries do not speak identical versions of the language, they are close enough that “good Brazilian Netflix shows normally go to number one in Portugal,” says Tiago Mello, a producer and partner at Boutique Filmes, which made Netflix's first Brazilian series, 3%.

**“Brazil is not only a country of over 200 million people – it's also Netflix's second largest territory outside of the US”**

## Stepping stone

Globo has been available in Portugal for more than 40 years, a go-to destination for that Lat Am staple; the telenovela. Since October, its streaming platform Globoplay has been available in Portugal (as well as 20 other European countries). The company now wants to capitalise on Portugal's geographical and cultural relationships with Brazil. “Portugal is midway between Europe and the Americas, our stories and families bring us together,” says Ricardo Pereira, director of Globo Portugal. The media giant intends to make content for local Portuguese audiences to test the water before experimenting elsewhere, with shows then available to be shown back at home. Korea's *Squid Game* has further underlined how subtitles are no longer a barrier, something noted by Marcela Parise, Globo's head of international marketing.

## A 'silver' moment

History has repeatedly proven that smaller countries (Portugal's population is 10 million) can become globally recognised players. The impact of Israel (with shows such as *Fauda* and *Be Tipul*) and Denmark (*The Killing*, *Borgen*) cannot be overstated. In a much heralded ‘golden age’ for drama, the conditions of the local and global TV landscape mean Portugal is experiencing what one speaker aptly described as its ‘silver’ moment and suggests there is plenty more to come. **TBI**



## Spreading the word

Poetry is undeniably personal. For spoken word artists like Sarah Callaghan it's a collection of intimate feelings. Of love, of loss. Of thoughts found around the city and tapped into a phone's notes.

Performing, too, is personal. Poets need somewhere they feel comfortable expressing themselves. Spaces where they can be totally vulnerable.

Sky Arts provides this positive place. The now free-to-air channel gives undiscovered talent a stage on which they can shine. Original shows, such as Life and Rhymes, focus the spotlight on the diverse voices of Britain, inspiring artists and audiences to share in the emotions we all experience. No matter who we are. No matter where we come from.

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# Exploring new depths



Natural history was once the preserve of a select few broadcasters and producers, but cost-efficient technologies are opening up myriad new opportunities. Tim Dams reports

**F**or those in the natural history TV business, the past few years have been something of a wild ride.

Streamers such as Netflix and Apple TV+ have invested heavily in the genre, increasing the number of opportunities for commissions beyond the traditional buyers such as the BBC, Discovery and Nat Geo. Traditional broadcasters like NBC and ITV have also pushed into the natural history space.

The main reasons for the boom are well documented: platforms are hunting for standout content and are willing to pay for it; natural history has a long library shelf life; and audience interest in the natural world is at an all-time high amid concerns about the environment.

At the same time, the sector has gained access to much more affordable and better technology. This has opened up the natural history TV genre – once the preserve of big budget broadcasters and long-



Netflix underlined its natural history ambitions with *David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet*

established producers – to a wider range of outlets and creative talent.

“We’re finally getting very high-quality professional kit at a price that the amateur can afford,” says Keith Scholey, co-founder of Silverback Films, whose credits include BBC One’s *A Perfect Planet* and Netflix’s *David Attenborough: A Life on our Planet*.

Once, it would have cost a minimum of £80,000 (\$106,000) to get started with a camera good enough for the natural history market. A high spec, robust and portable camera like the Sony FS6 now comes in at around £6,000 (\$7,950), allowing filmmakers to get into the action quickly without

complex or intrusive camera set-ups.

“Everybody I know is purchasing this as their documentary go-to [camera] right now,” says Brieghe Whitehead, co-founder of White Spark Pictures, whose credits include *Impossible Planet*, distributed by Cineflix, and VR project *The Antarctica Experience*. More affordable tech advances have also expanded the creative possibilities of the genre.

## Unique perspectives

Stabilisation technology has become cheaper and more effective, allowing filmmakers to make cinematic content with the likes of DJI Ronin stabilisers. Mini-cams can also be attached to animals to see the world from their perspective, offering a plethora of new opportunities.

Paul Wooding, MD of Bristol-based Woodcut West, which recently made *Fukushima: Nature In The Danger Zone* – about the animals living in the exclusion area around the Japanese nuclear disaster site – says natural history can now be captured with sophisticated but easy-to-use technology.

Filming in Fukushima, Woodcut West made use of small, low-cost but high-quality camera traps to show the range of creatures living in the exclusion zone.

Wooding’s other favourite pieces of kit include the M-Series remote dolly system by Motion Impossible, which has a quiet electric motor system and allows filmmakers to drive a camera into difficult filming areas. “It means we can now keep up with animals such as a cheetah on rough terrain,” he says.

Many natural history makers say that the drone represents perhaps the biggest advance for filmmakers of the past 10 years. Laura Marshall, CEO of *Primal Survivor* producer Icon Films and chair of natural world storytelling organisation Wildscreen, says the drone has “expanded our view and understanding of the natural world” and that it “brings grandeur and perspective to programmes.”

“Everyone is raving about the new DJI Mavic Pro 3 drone,” adds White Spark Pictures’ Whitehead. The kit can stabilise itself in high winds, operate in temperatures of -10C, and has over 46 minutes flying time.

Despite these affordable tech advances, most big blue-chip documentaries are still produced by well-established, leading production companies run by experienced and talented creatives.

But the lower and mid-market has opened up significantly, allowing more talent to enter the industry. It used to be that very few people could afford to rent kit for long enough to prove that they had the ability to create great content, says Icon’s Marshall.

## Empowering talent

Of particular note, Marshall says, is the emergence of local ‘in-country’ talent using affordable tech to capture natural history footage. In years gone by, such talent might not have been used or indeed trusted – until recently the prevailing trend was for Western filmmakers to travel with expensive kit to the likes of Africa, India and South America to tell their natural history stories.

However, the pandemic has helped accelerate a shift. Many established natural history makers were unable to travel to film on location during lockdowns, so more local talents who have access to technology have been used for production.

“That is where I think the stories will start changing,” says Marshall, explaining that people on the ground with local knowledge and access to behaviours, parks and species will be supplying content.

Her point is echoed by Woodcut West’s Paul Wooding, who says animal experts and local safari guides can bring their experience to a TV audience. “By taking advantage of this emerging technology and sourcing the right experts to use it, we can now go into a world we may never have seen before or see familiar stories in a new light.”

Of course, this doesn’t mean that anybody can suddenly become a natural history programme maker. Silverback’s Keith Scholey reckons it takes 10 years to train up a natural history producer.

“To be a good wildlife producer, and certainly a good wildlife cameraman, you have to be able to work out what an animal is going to be doing in five

**“The drone has expanded our view and understanding of the natural world – it brings grandeur and perspective”**

Laura Marshall,  
Icon Films



*Fukushima – Nature In The Danger Zone* was filmed using small, low-cost, but high-quality camera traps

or ten minutes time,” says Scholey. “To work that out, you have to watch a lot of animals doing stuff – you can’t shortcut that.”

## Distribution differences

Tech changes aren’t just affecting production, however. Distribution of natural history programming has evolved rapidly as well.

Take the WildEarth TV channel as an example. It runs 24/7 with eight hours of live broadcasting a day including a four-hour sunrise safari filmed in Southern Africa, and a sunset safari. Its high-definition live stream is distributed via traditional channels such as DSTV over Africa, KPN in Holland, and Elisa in Finland. It’s also available via FAST channels like Samsung TV Plus in Brazil and Xumo in the US. That’s not to mention distribution via its own website, and WildEarth apps on iOS, Google Play, Roku, Amazon Fire TV and LG.

“Technology has absolutely revolutionised what we do on the distribution side,” says WildEarth CEO Graham Wallington, who says it is now economically viable to deliver free ad-supported TV channels via the internet. A few channel gatekeepers no longer control access to consumers, he says. “The whole thing has been democratised... and that is entirely due to technology, or more specifically the internet.”

Wallington says WildEarth is in the process of pulling its stream from platforms such as YouTube, even though it has over 360,000 subscribers. YouTube only offers one pre-roll ad opportunity at the beginning of a long live broadcast, making it hard to monetise. “We built a huge audience on these platforms. But they don’t pay the bills. FAST technology has not only allowed us to reach an audience, but to monetise that reach – something that wasn’t possible before.”

Whether in production or distribution, all agree that natural history TV is enjoying a purple patch at the moment. And there are more production companies emerging to take advantage of increased demand. “It’s nutrient rich out there at the moment,” says Marshall.

Amid the boom, Scholey sounds a word of warning. He says natural history has been through cycles of boom – and then bust – several times in his career. “I find boring natural history very boring indeed. If people just start trying to churn it out, it’ll become boring.”

Innovation, Scholey says, is the key to sustaining the boom. And this, perhaps, is something that technology can help with. **TBI**



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## Can indie kids shows still go global?

It's a producer's dream to create a hit show that turns into a global brand, but is an OTT world making it easier or harder to achieve? Mark Layton talks to leading kids execs to find out

**A**s the global streaming boom rumbles along, with new services still regularly rolling out in new territories, those in the kids industry are seeing monumental changes to the familiar landscape.

The ability for kids content creators to build a global brand beyond just the shows themselves has long been a major yardstick for success. Yet the arrival of largely US-based services with vast purchasing power such as Disney+, Netflix and Paramount+ is altering how the old order used to operate.

According to research from Ampere Analysis, in the three-year span between October 2018 and early November 2021, four of the five top commissioners of first-run kids content worldwide – The Walt

*CoComelon* is the most watched kids brand on YouTube, with 3.5 billion average monthly views

Disney Company, Netflix, ViacomCBS and WarnerMedia – were US-based.

UK pubcaster the BBC filled out the top five and while other non-US commissioners such as France Télévisions and Italy's Rai also commissioned in big numbers, the pressure on traditional linear broadcasters – once the most likely path to global success for kids content creators – are now finding themselves in fierce competition with global streamers for the best content.

### The ups and downs of SVOD

While landing a commission from a global SVOD may seem like the logical first step to building a global kids

brand, there are pros and cons to partnering with these platforms, as with any avenue to market.

Global SVODs are generally open to taking more risks – on genre or YA content – than linear services, which typically seek programming that will appeal to wider demographics. They also have much deeper pockets and can provide funding for high-quality projects that local channels and VOD services perhaps cannot.

And when it comes to brand building, having the backing of a big streamer certainly does not hurt. “Netflix as a name is good for a brand, it definitely gives you some reputation and some quality stamp,” says Nicolas Eglau, MD of EMEA and APAC at UK-based *CoComelon* rights holder Moonbug Entertainment.

On the flip side, however, building a brand typically requires three components; marketing, exposure and repetition – the latter meaning the number of times your show is going to be placed in front of a viewer.

As David Michel, the president of *Theodosia* producer Cottonwood Media and co-founder of owner Federation Entertainment in France, notes: “You probably have the exposure with the platforms, but not the repetition.”

Placing your show on an OTT platform always runs the risk of it getting lost within ‘the algorithm’ and rather than getting pushed to a viewers’ attention, there is a chance it can potentially disappear into a vast muddle of content.

Eduardo Garagorri, COO at Spanish *Pocoyo* producer Zinkia, also highlights that streaming services are not completely “transparent” about their viewing figures, which can hamper discussions around merchandising opportunities, an essential area for growing a global brand beyond just the show.

“They don’t have any kind of ratings or data from the audience on what my content is driving. It’s not giving me the leverage to negotiate licensing deals.

“I can tell them I’m with Netflix, I’m with HBO, I’m with Amazon worldwide, and they still keep telling me, OK, but what are the ratings? How many people are viewing?”

Furthermore, on the rights front, selling a show to a global platform as a global exclusive may be likely to bring more money at the outset, but that then leaves the rights tied up in the hands of that service.

Marc du Pontavice, founder and president at France’s Xilam Animation, which is behind shows such as *Oggy And The Cockroaches*, suggests an alternative: “Play with windowing so that the streamer delivers an initial introduction and boost for the project as a first window, and then the show can continue to build up on free TV thereafter.”

**“In my view,  
to build a mega  
brand, YouTube  
is essential”**

Nicolas Eglau,  
Moonbug Entertainment



*Pocoyo* producer Zinkia says big streamers often do not share audience data, slowing down potential merchandising talks

## Utilising YouTube

Subscription VOD services are, of course, not the only route to building a global brand. AVODs, particularly YouTube, can be immensely important.

YouTube channels act as a complementary service, helping to build a brand alongside SVOD and linear – so long as content, whether that is shorts, clips or even full episodes, is published frequently and on a reliable schedule.

In-fact, Moonbug’s Eglau goes so far as to say that “to build a mega brand, YouTube is essential.”

Moonbug has had great success with the Google-owned service, last year acquiring *CoComelon*, which, with 122 million subscribers and more than 3.5 billion average monthly views, makes it the most subscribed kids’ channel in the world and the second-most subscribed channel outright.

*CoComelon* has since expanded on to global streaming services including Netflix and a litany of local players worldwide. Subsequently, no doubt seeing the value in its stable of brands, Kevin Mayer and Tom Staggs’ Blackstone Group-backed investment outfit acquired Moonbug in a \$3bn deal in November.

Eglau believes that *CoComelon* “would never have been so successful on Netflix without YouTube” and Xilam’s du Pontavice adds that the AVOD offers exposure for smaller indies. “If you don’t have access to a global streamer or pay-TV network, and you start from a local perspective, use AVOD (YouTube and others) as well as social networks to expand.”





However, as with the SVOD path, there are downsides to YouTube too. It is a big risk to produce a show purely with the intention of placing it on the service, where financial returns are negligible until very high view counts are achieved.

It is also one of the hardest platforms to cut through on and to do so can take many years and hundreds or even thousands of videos to build up an audience comparable to the biggest brands.

### Greater visibility

Before VOD, there was linear, and in this changing landscape, selling a show to a local service also comes with its ups and downs.

Unlike OTT services, where shows can get swallowed up by ‘the algorithm’, linear channels

*Momolu And Friends* producer Ferly says pubcasters are seen as “gatekeepers” to safe content, while *Moominvalley* firm Gutsy notes how linears can help long-term brand building

tend to give shows on-air promotions and re-runs, what Cottonwood’s Michel describes as an “almost guarantee of visibility”.

“Linear broadcasters still tend to cross-promote their programmes, which can help build brand awareness for the long-term,” highlights Katherine Senior, head of international sales at *Moominvalley* producer Gutsy Animations.

When building a brand locally there is also generally less competition and local broadcasters often want or (depending on legislation in the particular country) need to support locally created content and brands.

Furthermore, in the same way that a prominent SVOD can add a stamp of quality, linears can do the same. Laura Levanlinna, CEO and co-founder of Finland-headquartered Ferly Animation, which is behind *Momolu And Friends*, says: “Strong children’s programming in the local language on public and non-public linear broadcasters has an important role in parent’s eyes as gatekeepers to safe children’s content.”

Meanwhile, on the rights front, the territory-by-territory approach not only has the upside of offering pubcaster endorsement, but tends to allow producers to hold on to global rights.

Downsides, however, include the limited ‘shelf space’ available on linear services, which typically take less risks and are looking for shows that must appeal to a wider audience, while there is also less local funding available in smaller countries – and certainly less so than from the global SVODs and their deeper pockets.

### New paths to success

Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for success when it comes to global brand building, but for the moment, these US-based SVOD services are not outright replacing linear and local commissioners.

Instead, they are offering new paths to take content global and serve as another tool in the box for brand building, complementing the more traditional routes and the new opportunities offered by AVODs such as YouTube.

Furthermore, SVOD interest in original kids content is high and comes alongside their rising demand for local content across all genres.

Producers, meanwhile, seem optimistic about the new opportunities that global SVODs are bringing to local indies. These are expected to increase as services expand and continue to turn from bulk acquisitions to third-party commissioning as they seek to differentiate their offering. **TBI**

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# Making a mockery



**A**s stats go, a single show being streamed for 57 billion minutes over just 12 months makes quite an impression. Yet it wasn't a talent-laden drama with a seven-figure budget or even a celebrity-packed dating format – it was a mockumentary.

The US version of *The Office* has long been a fan-favourite and that appears to have remained the case

in 2020, at least if you believe the aforementioned data from ratings agency Nielsen.

Indeed, the show was regularly the most-watched on Netflix in the US before it moved to NBCUniversal's streamer Peacock for 2021, and it has clear pulling power among a younger demo too, one which rarely if ever watches linear TV.

So is the mockumentary the secret to tempting teens

Gaming, social media and the innumerable diversions available on a mobile phone mean TV has a tough task attracting teens. Helen Dugdale explores if mockumentaries are the answer



away from their consoles and back to the small screen?

“Traditional broadcast TV doesn’t cater for teens,” says Tim Sealey, operations director at Roughcut Television, the award-winning firm behind two of the more recent UK mockumentaries: *Stath Let’s Flats* and *People Just Do Nothing*.

“I’ve got a teenage boy and he never watches TV, especially broadcast TV – generally nothing is very

relatable. Teens love both these shows though because they can see their friends in the characters. Everyone knows those character types: the dominant one, the follower, the idiot, the pseudo entrepreneur, and the bullshitter. In *People Just Do Nothing*, those guys are quite immature – it just appeals to teens.”

While *Stath Lets Flats* is very much scripted, *People Just Do Nothing* “is quite ad-lib”, says Sealey, highlighting that a key reason for the shows’ popularity among younger viewers is that they offer “a sort of authenticity,” he says.

“With *People Just Do Nothing*, the guys who play the characters are, in some ways, those guys in real life. *Stath Lets Flats* feels pretty authentic because [creator] Jamie [Demetriou] is an amazing performer. He is of Greek origin so it’s coming from his experience of his family, it just feels real,” continues Sealey.

### German genius

Mockumentary as a medium also allows the crew, the actors and the audience to revel in exaggerated real life, wrapped up cleverly in ridiculousness.

It is that set-up which lies behind WarnerMedia Germany’s latest commission, *Greenlight: German Genius*. The comedy is set in the world of local TV and stars Kida Khodr Ramadan and *The Office* star Ricky Gervais as themselves, with Warner TV Comedy and W&B Television producing.

The show itself is a dramatised retelling of real events following a 2018 Twitter exchange in which Gervais praised Ramadan for his performance in German crime drama *4 Blocks*. Ramadan persuades Gervais to give him the rights to make a local adaptation of his BBC comedy series *Extras* but runs into difficulty due to the lack of international stars in the country.

Unveiling the show late last year, WarnerMedia’s VP of original production Anke Greifeneder said it would “satirise the German media landscape and at the same time its own origins”.

It’s not the only mockumentary to have emerged from Europe, either. WarnerMedia was behind 2019 mockumentary *Other Parents*, while just this summer German producers Tellux Film, Indiana Production in Italy and the UK’s Born Wild joined forces on *One Euro Village*.

The show, which also has CJ ENM-owned distributor Echo Rights onboard, follows events in a

*People Just Do Nothing* offers “a sort of authenticity”, to teenagers, says Roughcut Television’s Tim Sealey

small, provincial Italian town that draws an influx of holiday home developers after it announces the sale of its dilapidated housing stock for €1. However, a clerical error results in all the new homeowners coming from German-speaking countries who don't speak a word of Italian.

## Character studies

The source of inspiration for most of these mockumentaries – the well-meaning doc – also tends to offer a readymade template on which a comedic alternative can be based.

Talking earlier this summer, BBC Comedy chief Jon Petrie, who was also executive producer on *Stath Lets Flats* and *People Just Do Nothing*, gave his take.

“British mockumentaries do cringe so well. Audiences are very familiar with the language of documentaries and they are excellent character studies. Documentary directors will always focus on the colourful and absurd characters in life, so comedy writers and performers will often study these to create

### “Traditional broadcast TV doesn't cater to teens”

Tim Sealey,  
Roughcut Television



Shows like *Greenlight: German Genius* and *Stath Let Flats* take their cues from genuine documentaries

their own reimagined versions.”

For Fiona McDermott, head of comedy at *Stath Lets Flats*' UK broadcaster Channel 4, the appeal is the combination of idiocy and tenderness.

“This is a classic gang show. It's workmates, friends, family, would-be lovers. It's accessible but it's unique in tone and dialogue, there's nothing on TV that looks or sounds like *Stath* and that's something to celebrate.

“Young viewers also find it refreshing how original it sounds. And the wealth of quotable one-liners that young fans especially have picked up on and run with is a really special aspect of this show.”

Petrie, who also worked on the *People Just Do Nothing In Japan* movie, believes the show reflects elements of life the audience knows.

“The show benefitted from a mix of nostalgia and the resurgence of garage in the UK and crossed across multiple platforms like radio, live events and television. The music is good, the world feels authentic and it's funny. It's celebrating the culture and not making fun of it.”

## Youth demo

The hyperactive editing style of some mockumentaries is also suited to a younger audience, many of whom live every day in the digital world.

“The way *People Just Do Nothing* is shot and the ad-lib nature of it makes it feel more real and like content they're watching on YouTube,” adds Petrie. “*Stath Lets Flats* is more conventional as a TV show. It is shot more like a traditional comedy and is scripted that way.”

*Stath Lets Flats*, which has been hailed by some as the successor to *The Office*, saw its third season back on UK screens in October. And, following in the footsteps of its mockumentary forerunner, it too is heading for a US remake, with Fox adapting the format, which has been titled *Brent Rents*.

Over the pond in the UK, Channel 4 has commissioned Roughcut's *Big Boys*, a six-part comedy series about an unlikely friendship between two young men who meet at university.

“It touches on darker issues from growing up to sexuality and mental health, but it's still very funny,” Sealey says.

Petrie and the BBC are also on the prowl for the next big thing in the genre, but he suggests that good mockumentaries “tend to grow in a more organic way than traditional sitcoms.” The hope for Roughcut and others is that *Stath Lets Flats* and *People Just Do Nothing* have prepared the ground for a new generation of teen-engaging mockumentary programming that may just go global. **TBI**



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# Buyer profiles

YouLook's Benedicte Steinsrud, explains how her streamer is operating in the fast-emerging AVOD ecosystem, while Viasat World's Karin Heijink, discusses how one of her biggest recent successes emerged via a virtual market

## Benedicte Steinsrud, YouLook



**What has been your best acquisition of the past few months and what does it say about your current buying strategy?**

We did a few great deals recently to secure critically acclaimed documentaries, shows about royals and also some about obscure and special interest topics so that we could launch our Documentary channel. Being broad but niche at the same time is very much in line with our buying strategy.

**How do you differentiate the programming on your network/platform from the competition?**

We rotate our channels carousel on our web/apps to feature either channels we want to highlight and/or new arrivals.

**Can you give an indication of the budgets available?**

As an AVOD outfit, all our deals are strictly revenue-share based.

**What types of shows are not working?**

Since we are only a few months in, I will give it a little more time before commenting on what does not work.

**What types of rights do you require and is there any flexibility?**

We acquire non-exclusive AVOD rights on a one-year term and up.

**Are you looking for pre-sale/co-production opportunities?**

Yes, always looking for content that suits us that we can put our stamp on.

**What's the best way for distributors/producers to present an idea to you?**

Send us an email with what you want to pitch!



## Karin Heijink, Viasat World

**What has been your best acquisition of the past few months and what does it say about your current buying strategy?**

We've acquired some fantastic titles for each of our channels recently, in line with our buying strategy of identifying new,

high quality with returning potential for Epic Drama and Viasat Explore, and titles aligned with our content pillars for Viasat History and Viasat Nature. It's hard to choose just one as we've had many, but it would have to be *Charlie Bee Company*, a new series for Viasat Nature that we're very excited about, especially as it was pitched at a meeting at 'Virtual Realscreen 2021'.

**How do you differentiate the programming on your network/platform from the competition?**

We know our core genres inside out and only secure premium quality content for our channels. We often acquire content exclusively for the CEE markets where we operate, with our channels providing a home for some of the most-loved international TV series.

**Can you give an indication of the budgets available?**

Our budgets remain healthy and allow us to still be a partner in projects in a pre-buying stage.

**What types of shows are not working?**

We're not looking for magazine-style car shows or purely transactional shows on Viasat Explore, but we are interested in finding more fishing shows for the channel. On Viasat Nature, we are always looking for blue chip content for our Amazing Places and Amazing Animals slots and we're always on the lookout for landmark series on ancient civilisations for Viasat History.

**What types of rights do you require and is there any flexibility?**

We aim to secure SVOD and linear rights, so we can make our content available on demand where possible via our operator partners' SVOD services.

**Are you looking for pre-sale/co-production opportunities?**

We're always interested in exploring opportunities to take more of a stake in the content we air. We tend not to take an editorial line in projects, focusing on a pre-buy and top-up funding approach instead. We actively track projects in a very early stage and if it is the right project we are able to commit early as well, which helps producers to get the funding together.

**What's the best way for distributors/producers to present an idea to you?**

Pre-Covid we attended all the major markets, but we've successfully switched to meeting remotely and have found it a really efficient way of working. We welcome new ideas from distributors and producers big and small, and you can reach us by emailing our acquisitions and programming team directly: [seniha.tunaboynu@viasatworld.com](mailto:seniha.tunaboynu@viasatworld.com).

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# Buyer profiles

NTV's Gabi Nensel tells us about the best performing shows on her network and what she's looking for next, while Portico Media CEO Jay Lin reveals the details of his buying strategy

## Gabi Nensel, NTV

**What has been your best acquisition of the past few months and what does it say about your current buying strategy?**

Our top three shows have been *World's Deadliest*, *The Huntsman* and *Air Crash Recreated*. This shows that good wildlife formats still work, but we also try unusual docs with formats like *The Huntsman* (below). Action and catastrophes still work as well.



**How do you differentiate the programming on your network/platform from the competition?**

We try to broadcast more of our own productions, as well as high quality international co-productions or pre-sales.

**Can you give an indication of the budgets available?**

They vary a lot and can't be fixed. Since we are a small station, the budgets are not as high as with big stations.

**What types of shows are not working?**

Lifestyle, art and culture, docusoaps, slow documentaries and character-driven documentaries.

**What types of rights do you require and is there any flexibility?**

Free TV rights, of course, but now it's also standard to be able to exploit the documentaries on our online platform. We always try to be flexible and find an agreement with the licensor.

**Are you looking for pre-sale/co-production opportunities?**

Yes, we are and we practice this.

**What's the best way for distributors/producers to present an idea to you?**

By mail, but of course also in person at the various TV trade shows.



## Jay Lin, Portico Media

**What has been your best acquisition of the past few months and what does it say about your current buying strategy?**

We have recently premiered worldwide the real-life adaptation of the anime BL (Boys Love) series *Love Stage* with very good results. Japanese BL has always worked very well for us and if you add a strong anime following on top of that it's a perfect match.

**How do you differentiate the programming on your network/platform from the competition?**

We currently are the only platform in the world exclusively focused on Asian LGBTQ+ content and distributing it worldwide. There are other LGBTQ+ OTTs out there, but their catalogues are mostly focused on Western content.

**Can you give an indication of the budgets available?**

Our acquisition budget can go up to \$1m per year.

**What types of shows are not working?**

Piracy is still a big problem in this part of the world. If a show

has premiered in a specific territory and a little later we premiere it exclusively on our platform in a different territory, piracy will destroy any possible advantage. That is why we are focusing on shows we can premiere first or at the same time as other platforms.

**What types of rights do you require and is there any flexibility?**

We mainly acquire VOD rights. However, recently we have successfully opened our own sales department for our original productions. We are also acquiring selling rights for third party titles to help LGBTQ+ content to have the broadest distribution possible.

**Are you looking for pre-sale/co-production opportunities?**

Yes! We have already co-produced several titles with countries around Asia, Europe and US, from viral series to film festival gems.

**What's the best way for distributors/producers to present an idea to you?**

We have our own platform for people to present their projects to us for co-production and distribution called GOL STUDIOS (gol-studios.com). Producers/distributors only need to fill out a simple form with the basic information of each project and we will revert to them ASAP. **TBI**

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## Last Word Adam Jacobs

### Taking the plunge

**“Unscripted content is at its healthiest for as long as I can remember - on the other hand, I’ve found it to be formulaic, risk-free and safe”**

**A**t the beginning of 2021, I was a freelance development consultant working up ideas and pitching them to linear broadcasters and streamers. As we start 2022, I now find myself moving into a full-time permanent position at Quintus Studios, a next generation AVOD broadcaster and distributor. How times have changed!

There was a time during the peak of Covid that work opportunities were less about choice and more about necessity. However, when the opportunity arose to move into the digital world, I felt I couldn’t turn it down. Having worked for a linear channel for several years and then moving into production, what was behind my decision to enter this brave new world?

It’s certainly not because TV is dead. In some respects, unscripted content is at its healthiest for as long as I can remember. However, on the other hand, I have also found it to be formulaic, risk-free, and safe. Yes, there are still unique and original ideas coming to our screens, the recent Steve McQueen series *Uprising* for the BBC being a favourite of mine as an example. But there are still remakes and reboots a-plenty that make me sigh in despair too.

I spent the first half of this year developing my own ideas, alongside those for others, trying to get something off the ground. Granted, I don’t expect everyone to like everything I’ve sent, let alone commission them. But I’ve found this year even more difficult than previous in trying to break through the barrier and at least discuss content, rather than send just a dismissive “this won’t work for us” - or sometimes offer no response at all.

The content I send may not be quite right, but unless channels are willing to engage in conversation about it, then I may always be

slightly off the mark. Plus it’s good to talk, right? We don’t even have to engage in a physical meeting if you don’t want to! But it’s difficult to build new relationships and push forward-thinking ideas if there is not a joint effort to do so, especially when a lot of time and effort has gone into writing, designing, and fine tuning a pitch to then receive no constructive feedback or no reply at all.

This is of course not always the case. I’ve had many great discussions around content and even the odd greenlight or two. But things could be improved and made better by a little more engagement, with the goal to develop and bring to the screen thought provoking, innovative and original unscripted content.

So why the move over to digital? Well for a start, the commissioning process is a lot quicker. At a linear broadcaster, the decisions tend to be based on audience and channel data. But for an AVOD player such as Quintus, we can drill down into the most minute detail on what our subscribers are watching to help make our commissioning decisions and therefore the whole process is faster.

We know what really works and we aim to super serve our existing audience with the content they love. So there is less sitting on ideas and making the producer wait for months on end for an answer.

When the possible move to an AVOD player arose, I was a little sceptical at first with perhaps a risky move to a new, unfamiliar area for me. But I can’t blame broadcasters for being risk averse and then doing the same thing myself. So, I took the plunge, and it’s very much so far so good – ideas have been pitched, shows have been greenlit and production is underway, just how it should be. **TBI**

Adam is creative director at broadcaster & distributor Quintus Studios. He was previously executive producer at Woodcut Media and spent a decade at Discovery Channel as a buyer and commissioner



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