

TBI Television Business International

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How the country's
drama industry
really works
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EMILIA FOX

Signora

VOLPE

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Banijay
Rights

ROUTE 24

ACORN ORIGINAL



Banijay
Rights

Marie Antoinette



Chloe



The Good Karma Hospital



Screw



The Curse



Rogue Heroes

Signora Volpe



Then You Run



Grantchester



Peaky Blinders

Storytelling for every audience

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Editor's note Richard Middleton

Happy returns

It has been a rather frenetic period for those in the global content business, particularly after two years in which events and travel have been largely off the cards. The London TV Screenings was swiftly followed by Series Mania in France, and now we are up and at 'em in Cannes, ready for the newly repackaged MIPTV.

It could have felt like little had changed, as we slip back into our gadding about from festival to market, but there are signs everywhere that this business is evolving at an even quicker pace than before. Streamers continue to fuel the charge and broadcasters are attempting to roll with the punches and get back up again.

In this edition, we offer a deep dive into the French market to explore how it is dealing with the reshaping of its landscape. Turn to page 26 to read our analysis of why the country is introducing a raft of regulations dictating how streamers must behave on the content investment front – it provides plenty of room for thought for those elsewhere plotting how they might make the most of streamer spending while also defending their national industries.

We also speak to France Télévisions' head of international development to find out how he plans to use co-productions to tempt in younger viewers and we provide a fascinating insight into how the Korean drama business is changing – it's not all *Squid Game* and *Hellbound*.

If formats is your game, take a trip to South Africa to find out how a local talent show with a difference could be about to become a trailblazer for the country's unscripted industry and then flick to page 56 to find out why so much money is going into format funds.

Elsewhere, we delve into the world of mixed medium documentaries, speak to the team behind fascinating South African drama project *Paradys*, and provide insights aplenty into how HBO Max and Netflix are shifting their kids strategies.

And then lean back, take a breath and explore the myriad Hot Picks that perhaps best illustrate just how far we've come over the past couple of years...

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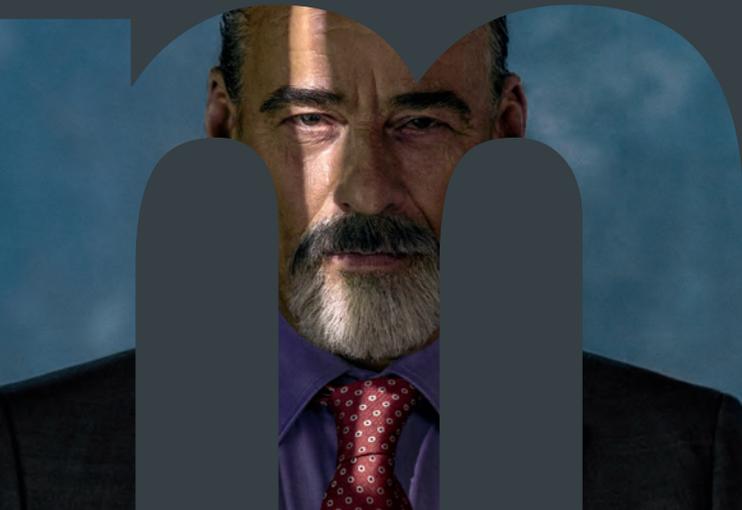
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Well-being Tracy Forsyth

How to cope in a permacrisis

Corporate wellness coach Tracy Forsyth shares five tips to help survive the ongoing barrage of stress

It is said that we are now living in a state of ‘permacrisis’. Political differences, a global pandemic, threats to the financial and physical health of our families, Me Too, George Floyd’s murder and now war in the Ukraine – it’s no wonder that we often feel exhausted and living on our last nerve.

The 24/7 barrage of news and data coming straight into our pocket devices, means that we are ‘always on’. We have to protect ourselves. Emotional turmoil can lead to burn out and cause depletion of mental and physical energy. So, if you are feeling overwhelmed at times, or all the time, here are five things that can help.

1. Detach from the digital. I know we are living in the digital era and no-one is going to separate us from our devices, but see if you can use them mindfully. Just in the same way eating a family sized bar of chocolate in one go may mean too much sugar going into the system, so too do hours of scrolling. The typical smartphone user scrolls through an average 300 feet of digital content every day, that is equivalent to the size of the Statue of Liberty and that’s just your phone! My tip: aim to set a limit on your digital consumption, bring it down by 50%.

2. Breathe. I use a technique called ‘Oceanic breath’ whenever I feel stressed. It’s proven to lower blood pressure and kick in the rest and digest part of the nervous system. It is a method of breathing that consists of a smooth long inhalation followed by an exhalation, during which the muscles at the back of the throat are tightened. Essentially, you end up making a noise with your breath like the ocean,

simply close your eyes and focus on that and at the same time slow down and lengthen your breath. Ten rounds or two minutes, it’s up to you.

3. Process what is really going on. We all have feelings, thoughts, fears and anxieties and even if we try to ignore them, they don’t go away. Take time to process them without judgement. Don’t try to squish them down, be mindful of them, acknowledge them. If your body is trying to tell you something then listen and work out what you need – a cry, a rant, a friend – and then do your very best to get it.

4. Walk it out. Spring is here so enjoy the sunshine, breath in that fresh air and soak up that Vitamin D. Getting your circulation going is amazing for your clarity of thought as your whole body is in motion, the blood is flowing and oxygen is getting transported to all your cells. And whilst you are out, put the phone away and look up, look around, look at the horizon – not only does it give your eyes a rest from the screen but I believe it lifts the spirits.

5. Hydrate and eat well. I once attended a talk by the author Nicholas Bate and he said for every caffeinated drink you have, drink a glass of water too. Generally, just hydrate yourself with the good stuff. And check what you are eating too, you know the drill – you are what you eat. So ditch the high salt, high sugar fare and pick all the tasty nutrient dense dishes instead.

Look after yourselves at MIPTV, switch off your phone, take a walk about Cannes and remember to breathe... **TBI**

Tracy is a creative mentor for the Channel 4 Indie Growth Fund, the producer of the WFTV mentoring scheme and a professional executive coach

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About Town

Getting Series about TV

There have been precious few positives to have come out of the pandemic but, for About Town at least, the opportunity to attend France's Series Mania twice within six months must surely be one. Tasked with creating an entirely new line-up of sessions half a year after the delayed 2021 iteration took place, the good folk behind the scenes worked miracles and came up trumps with panels that included HBO Max EMEA's commissioning team outlining wishlists, an array of outstanding projects in the Co-Pro Pitching Sessions and a bevy of programme showcases featuring content from the Balkans, Finland, France, Spain, Quebec and more. Much of the chat focused on the creative side of the scripted process, with Hagai Levi and Marie Roussin



among showrunners in attendance to explain their craft. Palpable excitement was felt at the opening night's reception, as drinks were quaffed and canapés gobbled, as delegates caught up with each other in person, many for the first time in two years. The last word, however, must go to Ukrainian film producer Julia Sinkevych, who was happily able to attend the event having been selected as jury president for this year's Series Mania Festival and its International Competition. With the ongoing conflict in her home country showing little sign of abatement, it was a sobering reminder to About Town that we were all very fortunate to be there.

Keeping it Loki

They say never to meet your (super)heroes, but TBI was delighted to indulge in a dose of Marvel mania last month at the Royal Television Society's behind-the-scenes panel with the cast and crew of *Loki*.

Stars Tom Hiddleston and Sophia Di Martino and writer Michael Waldron were in attendance, while director Kate Herron also Zoom-ed in to discuss the hit Disney+ series.

The foursome was tight-lipped about what to expect from a second season, but happy to share their thoughts on what it's like acting, writing and directing on the small-screen side of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.



Calling London



The London TV Screenings have been in operation in one way or another for several years, but 2022 was the first time there had been an officially co-ordinated schedule of physical events for international buyers to sign up to. A reported 500 buyers from as far afield as Australia, Latin America and Asia did just that, making the trip to the UK's blustery capital to catch a glimpse of the latest shows on offer from UK-based distributors and enjoy some face-to-face socialising and merriment.

Swings and Roundabouts

100,000 French drama event Series Mania Forum and Germany's Beta Group teamed to launch a new €100,000 (\$110,000) creative initiative to help film directors moving into TV series.

8.5 Amazon formally completed its \$8.5bn acquisition of MGM, handing it rights to more than 4,000 film titles including *Licorice Pizza* and *Robocop*, as well as more than 17,000 TV episodes from shows such as *Fargo*, *Vikings* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

18 Shares in UK broadcaster ITV fell by 18% following the announcement of its new streamer ITVX, which will bring dramas like *The Confessions Of Frannie Langton* to the service ahead of ITV's linear channels.

37 Australian soap *Neighbours* was cancelled after 37 years on screens. Producer Fremantle had initially hoped to find another UK co-commissioner after the show was dropped by Channel 5.





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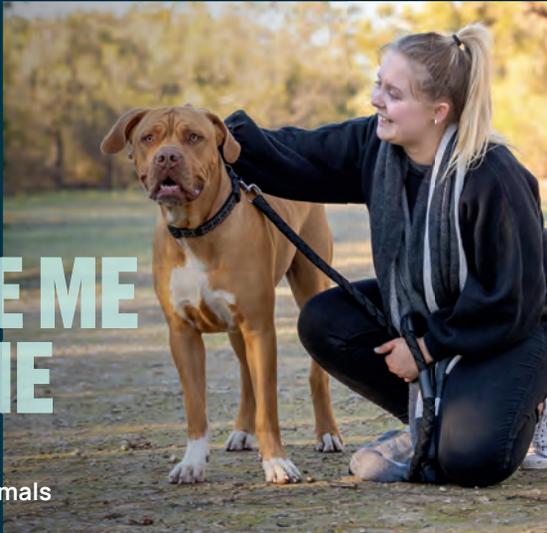


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Diversity Deborah Williams

Understanding disability access

Deborah Williams reflects on the CDN's recent Diamond report and suggests what needs to change to improve disability access

Fear has the ability to stop us all in our tracks and keep us in a place of negativity. It's something that I've been thinking about a lot recently. As our industry opens up, with the return of events such as MIPTV, I need to leave my house and get back into the swing of things the way they were in 2019.

That feels a long time ago. And what's dominating my thoughts is where the diversity conversation fits into this opening up process.

There's no doubt this conversation has been much more prominent across all areas of the industry over the last few years. In particular, how to improve ethnicity and gender representation and tackling issues such as toxic working cultures, bullying and harassment. Change is coming and is on the whole being embraced. But two things are still niggling away.

Firstly: Disability. And in particular – access. Not so much in terms of individual needs and requirements, but access – where you're more likely to get a commission if you have 'access' to communities or key players, in the sense of getting things on screen. Yet the consideration of access relating to disabled people is seen and presented purely as an expensive burden, rather than something much more fundamental. The thinking is so immature and underdeveloped, and contributes to the continuing suppression of disability representation.

In March, CDN released *The Fifth Cut: Diamond At 5*. While we celebrated the growing impact five years of robust diversity data is having on our industry, the figures themselves were depressing. There has been a 1.5% increase in disabled representation off screen in content produced for the main UK broadcasters and a 2% increase on screen in that period. This is in part due to our own Doubling Disability campaign, which has seen our members raise their game in terms of seeking out disabled talent and facilitating more engagement and entry-level opportunities.

But as usual this has been on the terms of operation that our industry currently uses: a 'one in, one out' approach. And it's mainly white, male, wheelchair users' experiences that are foregrounded and slotting into the shape that already exists, rather than giving real thought to meeting the needs of this community of talent – on and off screen.

The second thing is change or transformation?

The changes that are happening are long overdue, and will make for a stronger, more robust industry better suited to the challenges of the future. The adaptation to virtual production and networking techniques due to Covid-19 has proved that pre-existing methods of working do not need to be set in stone.

However, I worry that this won't continue to improve or even remain as it is now; that for unfounded economic reasons, we may retreat to the past and that the new 'new normal' once again bypasses disabled people. This would signal the end of progress and of being properly able to tap into the creativity and economic value that the 15% of our world who are disabled bring.

We need to focus on transformation rather than just talking about change.

Let's take the best of virtual access to bring in new voices and perspectives that will make our industry more representative and will, in turn, bring audiences with us. Let's enable those who historically have been excluded to feel properly included and appreciated. To be mined for their ideas, to be placed at the centre, and paid appropriately.

We need to take the flexibility that disability access gives us and match it with the confidence that the industry access gives us to create a new kind of understanding of access – as something hugely positive and commercially viable to content innovation in a global marketplace. **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

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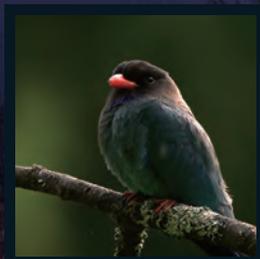
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Opinion Siobhan Crawford

Sweet returns

Siobhan Crawford casts her eye over the format offerings headed to MIPTV and lands upon Brown Sugar

MIPTV is upon us and the joy is palpable. The return to MIPTV should have been a little overshadowed by the London Screenings, the event now marketed as “vital to international buyers due to the increasingly important role of distributors earlier in the commissioning journey” – but really, this event was never about formats.

So, what do we know about so far? A few cookery formats, a smattering of dating – in ball gowns, in villas or on a film set – and again, more guessing formats. The influence of *The Masked Singer* has no end.

It is quieter for new launches, there is no doubt, and there seems to be no ‘one’ format we wave our cheque books at blindly. Reviewing the offerings, I do question how some formats get commissioned! One was a mish-mash of *Single Town*, *Temptation Island* and a bit of *Seven Year Switch* for good measure. Another seems to be a cooking format inspired by a heritage reality format (rodent, mole...).

And what happened to our love of revivals this MIPTV? Tonight Matthew, I will be... buying a slightly adapted derivative? We will see drag queen celebs (and Banijay and Fremantle) with handbags at dawn in the head-to-head competition of similar formats. And when I saw an industry’s ‘top titles to watch’ list recently – facepalm – *Rain: The Untold Story*, I felt the need to find the format joy.

So, we ask – where are all the truly innovative formats this season? A clue, the diamonds of the first water are not at the screenings, they are in Cannes hidden amongst the conversations we have outside Brown Sugar. And yes, *Bridgerton* is on the brain and clearly it is inspiring many of you given the regency dating onslaught!

So here is some format joy. And it just so happens they mostly come from independents.

***Open House: The Great Sex Experiment* (Passion Distribution)**

This was the format I heard most about from buyers at the London Screenings and I get it, voyeurism is hot. We have seen dating in every other iteration, so this is

the natural progression. Think *Too Hot To Handle*’s sex lessons meets *Love Island*’s Casa Amor.

***Trash Gallery* (Phileas)**

A content creator that reliably delivers new ideas, pre-MIP this environmentally creative competition format has not even launched and key territories are signing up because the idea just makes sense and it is wrapped in the comfort of a traditional competition structure.

***The Story Of Us* (Media Ranch)**

This is a hybrid (unscripted/scripted) and there is a question mark over the recommission-ability but this is a huge hit in Netherlands, with 2+ million viewers in primetime on NPO1 plus online. The premise translates to every market, it fills our demand for scripted in an innovative way, and skews broad... move fast!

***Light Away!* (YTV)**

This was a surprise to me yet it is the most simple premise – stay away from the light. You can make a cinematic *Oceans Eleven*-inspired moment of your very own on the small screen – and so much better than marbles. I just want to watch it.

***True Hero* (WeMake)**

A combination of *Lost/Hunger Games/Insiders*, this manipulated reality format is designed with streamers in mind but this should not be a barrier, a format after all is adaptable! The trend for dark twists in reality formats is perfectly highlighted here.

And before we go, just one more thing, dear buyers – check the ratings. I know some sales people have some truly jedi-esque mind tricks, but 600k viewers in primetime and falls off the ‘lead in’ ratings cliff should really be listened to and not rewarded with recommissions. Many of us have formats that have solid ratings that deserve the space in your schedule. We will be at Brown Sugar if you need us. **TBI**

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

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Tech & Analysis Rob Gallagher

Globalisation of local

Netflix has proved a critical point that rivals and regulators must learn from when it comes to local production, writes Omdia's VP of research for media & entertainment, Rob Gallagher

Netflix: trusted local content partner or just another globalising US media firm? This question has become increasingly relevant since I posed it in 2017 – and Omdia analysis of viewing data from PlumResearch suggests fresh answers.

US companies have long dominated the global media & entertainment (M&E) landscape and, despite the globalising forces of the internet and economic growth, the country still accounts for \$267bn or 43% of total TV, online video and cinema revenues.

Netflix has provided a new twist on this dynamic by popularising and dominating SVOD. Available in 200 markets, its service has captured 18% of online video subscriptions and 36% of global revenues, according to Omdia. Outside of China, where Netflix is not officially available, its share is 26% and 40%, respectively.

This success has spurred Amazon, Apple, Disney, Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery to launch their own global streamers. By 2025, Omdia forecasts these US companies and Netflix will account for 42% of subscriptions and 50% of revenues worldwide, and 61% and 55%, respectively, excluding China.

As Netflix's success has grown, so have questions about its ultimate impact on M&E outside of the US. For local media firms, the US company could be a partner or competitor – or both – depending on what roles they play in the increasingly blurred TV, movie and video value chain. Regulators and policymakers are considering how Netflix might help or hinder their nation's creative economies and cultural “soft power” gained through the export of their content.

For other US media giants and local players with international ambitions, Netflix's example may serve as a playbook for global expansion and ultimately securing a seat on tomorrow's M&E industry leaderboard.

Five years ago, when I asked what impact Netflix would have on local content, I compared the share of native languages of the global population and Netflix's forecast subscriber base. At the time, only 5-11% of people spoke English as a first or second language, yet our forecasts suggested 61% of Netflix subscribers would be from English-speaking countries even in 2021.

I concluded that Netflix would make impressive – but essentially limited – investments in local content. While

it would increasingly turn to talent outside the US to attract and engage local audiences, it would only invest just enough on a country-by-country or culture-by-culture basis to keep subscribers paying their relatively small monthly fees.

Despite Netflix's success with *Squid Game* and *Money Heist* and multi-million dollar commitments to local production facilities and funds, I think this conclusion is still broadly correct. Omdia's analysis of Netflix viewing figures from our data partner PlumResearch throws new light on what will count as “just enough” investment and why.

International content is growing in popularity across all the 37 mid-to-large-sized markets PlumResearch supplied data for – including the US. For the top 100 titles by unique viewers in Netflix's domestic market, the percentage of those that involved non-US countries rose from 25% in Q3 of 2017 to 37% in Q4 of 2021. In India, that reached a high of 72% in Q2 of 2020.

Titles produced outside the US are less popular in countries with close ties, such as Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico and the UK. But in continental Europe and Latin America, they regularly accounted for more than 30% of top titles and around 50% in Asia Pacific.

Tastes in kinds of international content also varies by market. In South Korea and Japan, homegrown titles made up 63% and 40% of their respective top 20 rankings in Q4 of 2021. In Germany, France and Italy, however, local productions tend to account for 5-10% and other non-US ones around 40-45.

To answer my original question: the picture remains mixed, but more nuance is emerging.

Netflix will need to invest more in local content in Asia Pacific and other markets with less cultural affinity with the US, especially as it runs out of new subscribers in Western markets. It's also clear that Netflix can attract and keep subscribers worldwide happy by funding and promoting international titles with global appeal.

But its investments will remain small relative to the size of local populations, economies and cultures. And while media firms should promote diversity and inclusion, that responsibility shouldn't sit on Netflix's shoulders alone. It's now time for other US giants, local firms and governments to study its example to see how they can globalise the local for the world's benefit. **TBI**

Rob leads the team behind analyst and consultancy firm Omdia's global research on media and entertainment, digital consumer platforms, addressable consumer devices, and consumer artificial intelligence

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For all the people

France Télévisions has a new international team and a rejuvenated global scripted strategy to attract younger viewers. Marie-Agnès Bruneau speaks to Manuel Alduy, who is leading the charge

France's TV industry could be about to enter a transformative phase over the next year or so, should the proposed merger of M6 and TF1 take place, but it is not just these two networks facing potential change. The country's public broadcaster is also looking to shift its course and leading the charge on the drama front is former Canal+ and Fox exec Manuel Alduy, who has been navigating France Télévisions' scripted activity as director of movies and international development.

The broadcaster is now revisiting its international series strategy, exploring new co-production models, narratives and genres, while also looking to rejuvenate audience profile through international fare. Alduy, whose responsibilities include scripted acquisitions, is also looking for YA shows for a new France 5 strand.

It has clearly been a busy time. "Regarding co-productions, we stopped some developments, experimented on a few co-pros with the streamers and reorganised the team. Our current priority is to find The Alliance's next big shows," he tells TBI.

It is not just on the content front that change is apparent. Former director of acquisitions and international fiction, Nathalie Biancolli, and artistic director for international co-pros, Benoit Marchisio, both left at the end of last year.

In their place is Morad Koufane, formerly advisor to France Télévisions' programming director, who was appointed in January as deputy director for international series.

"We want 'organically international' shows, appealing to a mainstream audience with a key 25-50 focus, and able to generate conversation"



Alongside him is H el ene Saillon for co-productions and Catherine Gaucher for acquisitions.

Alliance steps up a gear

One focus for Alduy is The Alliance, which was formed four years ago with German pubcaster ZDF and Italian counterpart Rai. The goal was to initiate ambitious co-productions to rival streamers and at the end of last year, the first projects landed on flagship France 2.

None of them were major hits, however. The adaptation of Victor Hugo's classic novel, *Germinal*, launched in November to 4.4 million linear viewers (five million consolidated) and a 20% share, down by one million in the second week. Then, during the Christmas holiday, *Around The World In 80 Days* launched, capturing three million for the first week but then dropping by one million in the following week, this time with an audience share below the channel's average. In February, *Leonardo* performed less well, recording 2.2 million viewers on its first evening.

Alduy, however, says that he was satisfied with the shows' performances. "It's becoming very difficult to judge on live broadcast figures. *Around The World In 80 Days* gathered an additional 2.5 million viewers on France.TV (where all episodes had been made available at launch), half of them prior to live broadcast and the second evening's episodes were actually the most viewed online," he explains.

"And we must focus on what we are looking to achieve," he adds. "The first goal of these international series is to initiate different kinds of shows from our respective successful domestic drama fare," he explains.

"They are shows that are different too from local foreign series, which we can acquire on the market. We want them to address the 25 to 50 age group and that means that it can be sometimes at the expense of power. *Around The World In 80 Days* reached a family



Around The World in 80 Days (left) and *Germinal* (right) were the first projects to result from The Alliance pact between France TV and other European pubcasters

viewership, while *Germinal* managed to get a younger audience demo than our average, so in these aspects, they were a success, even though I have to admit that *Leonardo* did not as well."

Alduy also points out that the trio were the first projects of The Alliance. The strategy has since evolved with step two – moving away from classic literature and characters for more contemporary works – and is now moving into step three. Given the long development and production process, this transition may not be as clear to those outside of the group.

Three Alliance shows, involving both Rai and ZDF, are in production for delivery this year: Italy-initiated mystery family drama, *Survivors*, produced by Rodeo Drive and Cin et ev e, is wrapped; *The Reunion*, adapted from Guillaume Musso's French Riviera thriller *La Jeune Fille Et La Nuit* (Make It Happen, with MGM International distributing), is starting shooting; and the ZDF-led environmental event thriller adapted from Frank Sch aetzing's *The Swarm*. The latter is from Intaglio Films, NDF International and ZDF Enterprises, with Franck Doelger (*Game Of Thrones*) as executive producer.

"We are now looking for big stories that are natively European," Alduy says. "We still have the ambition for high-end series, we want them organically international, appealing to a mainstream audience with a key 25-50 focus, and able to generate conversation."

Model experiments

France T el evision is looking for around five co-productions in total, per year. Alongside The Alliance projects, the pubcaster has also been involved in a few French-speaking co-ventures, such as Swiss co-pro *Hors Saison*, selected at S eries Mania.

Survivors (right) is a mystery family drama from The Alliance, due to land later this year, while the acquired *Normal People* (below) was an online hit for France TV

Again tackling new genres and narratives, France Télévisions also stepped in on a couple of French co-productions with streamers, such as the soon-to-deliver action series *Coeurs Noirs* with Amazon Prime Video, about French special forces in Iraq.

There's also supernatural drama *Ouija*, from Fremantle's Kwai Production and an as-yet undisclosed streamer, which starts shooting in a month. Such streamer partnerships are a u-turn on France Télévisions' former strategy, although Alduy says it is less of a focus.

"It was a way to say that France Télévisions is flexible and can adapt to various production business models, he says of the two series. "With these, we have put all kinds of partnerships on the table – in some series, we can be the second broadcaster investing with maybe less money, and some series can either be co-run or separately, with no overlap. With *Ouija*, we are the first broadcaster, then with *Coeurs Noirs* we come in second."

Alduy adds: "We can work with any of the platforms, as long as we have an editorial input and the minimum of rights we need – and as long as the budget is bigger than the average French series.

"Streamers have been developing French drama for a while, but what's new is that they now compete with one another, sometimes on the same projects and, in a way, that can enable us to check which are the more pragmatic [to work with]."

Young adult acquisitions

The group has also been making inroads on its acquisition strategy, having picked up *Normal People* for online YA offer France.TV Slash. A new France 5 strand on Monday launched in February, too, shifting the focus from movies to become the linear home to Slash programming in a bid to enlarge its YA audience target.

The strand had not been in the works when the series was acquired, Alduy adds, but its "quality" and the fact that it had not been seen widely in France, and had been a hit on the UK's BBC, meant it was worth trying. *Normal People* started with 500,000 viewers on France 5, a smaller channel, and slipped slightly, but its broadcast helped the show be an online success, where it was watched by 2.8 million online viewers in its first few weeks.

The *Normal People* deal also reflects that France Télévisions' acquisitions are now about the show rather than the strand. Aside from France 3's long-running Sunday (mostly) European crime drama strand, there are fewer dedicated strands for acquisitions.

The France 2 Monday strand has freed itself from the US fare it used to carry several years ago and has also enlarged its scope, welcoming international co-productions, alongside some acquisitions such as well-rated crime series *Death In Paradise*, and a smattering of French drama.

"Our roadmap is to look to reach an audience that's a bit younger with acquired series and to find shows that are event-driven, enabling us to differentiate ourselves," he says.

"For example, we acquired *The Tourist*, a series running on the BBC and HBO Max in the US, which is an action-thriller and which



we strongly believe will help to widen our demo audience," the exec explains.

Alduy also adds that there is not so much need to get involved upfront to secure acquisitions because there are more shows, while the tastes of the audience is also opening up, partly thanks to the streamers.

"There might be worries at private broadcasters, but as far as we are concerned we broadcast very few American series, so the fact that US majors are proposing fewer of them is not our concern.

"We have no problem of a shortage, it's the opposite – there are quite a lot of very good projects on the market. After the August edition of *Séries Mania*, we received [pitches] for 100 of them!

"The rise in demand for series means many creators and producers are pitching projects, while, with distribution consolidation, the studios get involved in international series to market them.

"We get a lot of shows from French groups such as Banijay, Federation and Mediawan or independent companies, and these are often very interesting projects. Broadcasters have all opened up their chakras," he says.

The new-look team is also evaluating projects in a continuum. France TV will get involved at an early stage only on ambitious projects in which it can play a part in the development process or make a choice in casting, for instance, Alduy explains, another example of the French pubcaster's nuanced shift in strategy. **TBI**

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All eyes on NFTs

From Banijay to Beta Film, TV companies are actively exploring how NFTs could help generate future revenues. Tim Dams investigates the opportunities being opened up by this relatively new market

The market for digital items known as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) exploded in popularity last year, and the TV industry has taken notice.

Nearly \$41bn was spent on NFTs in 2021 according to a recent *Financial Times* report, which concluded that the market is almost as valuable as the global art market.

NFTs are essentially digital ownership certificates registered on a blockchain, a public digital ledger that allows anyone to verify the NFT's authenticity and who owns it.

Unlike most digital items which can be easily reproduced, each NFT has a unique digital signature, meaning it is one of a kind. This makes them valuable to collectors, allowing them to be traded on secondary markets, where their prices rise and fall according to demand. NFTs are usually bought with cryptocurrencies or in dollars and the blockchain keeps a record of transactions.

Peaky Blinders is among the shows Banijay expects to be popular with NFT buyers from its content catalogue

Market to bounce back

NFTs really came to public attention last year when a collage by the artist Beeple sold for \$69.3m at auctioneer Christie's and Twitter founder Jack Dorsey sold the first ever Tweet for over \$2.9m.

Meanwhile, NFT collections such as CryptoPunks and Bored Ape Yacht Club have gone viral. Bored Ape NFTs now regularly trade for hundreds of thousands of dollars, with one selling for \$2.85m in January.

Famously, sports bodies such as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL) have teamed with Canadian NFT company DapperLabs to launch popular NFT marketplaces, offering iconic sporting moments and highlights as NFTs.

The appeal of NFTs is perplexing to many, who wonder why so much money is spent on items that only exist in digital form and can be viewed by anyone for free.

Certainly, the market has cooled this year, with the Ukraine war and a broader tech and cryptocurrency slump abating the trading frenzy that characterised 2021. According to the *Financial Times*, daily trading volumes on OpenSea, the biggest marketplace for NFTs, fell 80% to roughly \$50m in March after reaching a record peak of \$248m in February.

Despite this, many advocates believe this is just a dip in an NFT marketplace that is only likely to grow in the long term.

TV industry takes notice

The TV industry, in particular, is starting to explore the potential for NFTs.

Superindie group Banijay, for example, is set to dip its toe in the water later this year by offering NFTs based on the globally popular *Mr Bean* animation series, which is produced through subsidiary Tiger Aspect.

“We’re treating NFTs like a brand-new commercial category,” says Banijay chief commercial officer Owain Walbyoff. “Any content creator, or anyone with as much content as Banijay, needs to be looking into this and taking it seriously.”

Rights holders like Banijay can licence their content to NFT specialists to create NFT products to launch into the market, receiving a percentage of sales.

As well as *Mr Bean*, Banijay is planning to launch two or three other NFTs this year based on its IP. “We’re all very excited by this. The projections that the licencees are giving us [show] it is a high value category,” says Walbyoff.

As well as supplying the assets for *Mr Bean* to a licensee to create and sell the NFT products, Banijay will help support its launch in the NFT marketplace. *Mr Bean*, notes Walbyoff, has millions of fans across digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and TikTok, and is the number one TV brand on Facebook with 129 million followers.

“We would help them to promote it and encourage

people to purchase the NFTs. And then we would share in the profits, like any other licensing deal,” says Walbyoff, who is telling his commercial colleagues at Banijay to regard NFTs in a similar vein to, say, a *MasterChef* cookware deal.

Eying the Banijay catalogue, Walbyoff cites scripted content such as *Black Mirror* and *Peaky Blinders* as the kinds of shows likely to be popular with NFT buyers who want to “own something unique” from them.

He says that the NFTs could be more than just digital images but could also unlock video content that possibly hasn’t been televised before.

This offer of video content chimes with broader trends in the market. Many people think of NFTs as static digital artworks, but NFTs from the likes of the NBA and UFC go further by offering footage of key moments, be it a celebrated slam dunk or a knockout.

Feeling of ownership

Elsewhere, German production and distribution giant Beta Film is also actively exploring the NFT market.

It is partnering with Austrian NFT specialists MovieShots to offer NFTs from the cult German film *Run Lola Run (Lola Rennt)*. Scheduled for mid-April, around 1,400 NFTs from the film are being sold by MovieShots at a price of approximately €200, which would generate €280,000 if it sold out.

The role of the NFT specialist is important, says MovieShots founder Jan Leitenbauer. “There are many areas to think about. In addition to programming on the blockchain, NFT creation and defining the properties of around 1,400 individual images, a community has to be built up and looked after,” he explains. The ambition is to give NFT owners the feeling that they own a piece of the movie.

Beta Film’s Alexander Wolffersdorff says the company had heard about the hype behind NFTs when it was approached by MovieShots to explore the idea of creating NFT “collectors’ items” from its library of content.

“Any content creator, or anyone with as much content as Banijay, needs to be looking at NFTs and taking them seriously”

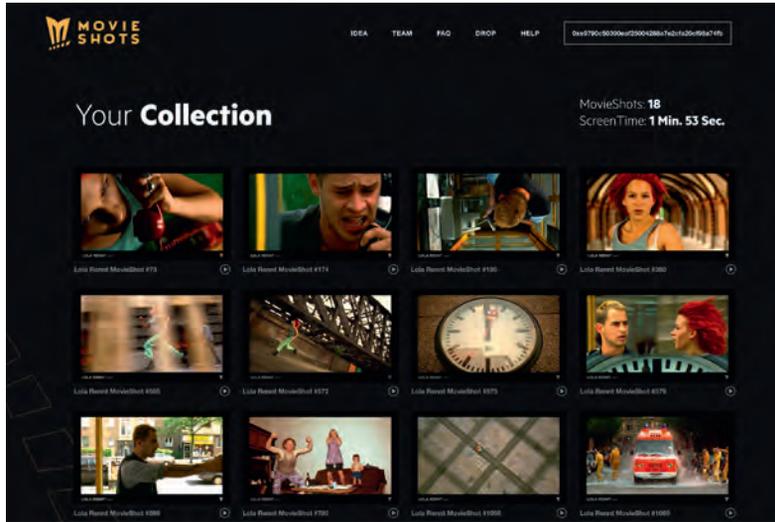
Owain Walbyoff,
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Austrian NFT specialists MovieShots offer NFTs from the cult German film *Run Lola Run* (*Lola Rennt*)



Potential revenue generated from sale of 1,400 NFTs from Beta Film's *Run Lola Run*

He says that what makes NFTs particularly interesting is that they are tradeable on secondary markets, thanks to the blockchain technology that provides proof of ownership.

The blockchain also stores smart contracts which are automatically executed with each sale, allowing the rights holder to automatically earn a share of revenue from each trade. This is typically around 3-5% of the selling price but can be as high as 10%.

“There is a constant revenue stream if an item should be successful,” says Wolfersdorff.

As in a traditional licencing or merchandising deal, revenues are shared among rights holders. It’s important to involve key stakeholders, says Banijay’s Walbyoff. “We want everybody to be onside and happy. If we did something with *Black Mirror*, we would always want Netflix and the original creators of *Black Mirror* to be on board with it, behind it and buying into it. It just gives the licence produced – the NFT – a far greater chance of success.”

Beta Film is now thinking about which of its titles might be suitable for NFTs next and plans to offer tokens for a black-and-white comedy classic from its library.

Innovative ideas

Other TV companies are exploring NFTs in innovative ways. Wildlife broadcaster Wild Earth TV, for example, recently launched NFT collections linked to individual animals on the Djuma Game Reserve in South Africa, from where it broadcasts live eight hours a day. Its Wildlife Conservation NFTs promise buyers that they can build a personal relationship with individual wild animals by receiving special updates and access to the animals’ sightings.

“You’re not buying a JPEG or a work of art, you’re buying the opportunity to feel like the custodian of that animal,” says WildEarth CEO Graham Wallington. He explains that 40% of the income generated from the primary sale goes to the custodian of the animal’s habitat, and that they would get 80% of royalties on future sales.

Elsewhere, independent studio and financier Goldfinch recently launched FF3, a platform where filmmakers can raise crowdfunding and leverage new technologies like NFTs to help fund their projects.

It recently raised money for short film *The Dead Of Winter*, with NFTs featuring scene stamps, film posters, director’s notes, scripts, the score and exclusive community access to director and producer Q&As being used to help fund the film.

Phil McKenzie, COO of Goldfinch, says NFTs can “better connect” content creators with patrons, investors and fans. He says many crowdfunding platforms have not taken off because, in the past, in exchange for funding an investor might only receive a DVD or T-shirt. He adds that investors have been put off from backing film projects because the sector is renowned for being murky and opaque.

“But with the technology we have now, we can give them a meaningful ownership of things and proper value,” says McKenzie, who points out that the blockchain technology underpinning NFTs allow investors to trade in and out of projects in a transparent way. “Say some huge director signed on to help a project, you could use that moment to cash in your position,” he says. “Somebody else might think it is an amazing time to buy.”

Others are looking at how NFTs could help finance projects. For example, *The Real World* creators Bunim/Murray Productions (BMP) and Animoca-backed tech venture Virtual Arts have just partnered on a new venture, Wonderfuel, that aims to use NFTs to fund programming.

Wonderfuel will roll out a slate of shows with NFTs “baked into” both the funding model and audience experience. NFTs will be released alongside the shows, in the hope that fans will buy them in order to gain access to rewards, which include involvement in creative decisions to sharing in prizes and fan experiences.

BMP and Virtual Arts think the sale of NFTs will enable both partial and full funding of shows, and get audiences involved in creating programming that they have a very real stake in.

Whether this takes off in the long-term remains to be seen. But there is little doubt that, for now, all eyes are on NFTs. **TBI**

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New horizons

France has been at the forefront of regulating domestic content investment from global streamers such as Netflix and Amazon, with countries around the world watching developments closely. Marie-Agnès Bruneau reports on what the changes mean

After a drawn-out process, the French government has finalised a new regulatory framework that will implement the European Audiovisual Media Service directive into French law. The result means global SVOD platforms must invest 20% of their French revenues into local production, split 80/20 between TV fare and theatrical films.

The process has seen several laws published, starting with the SMAD (Services de Médias Audiovisuels à la Demande) decree in 2021, followed by DTT and cabsat channels legislature, and then specific Netflix, Amazon and Disney+ conventions, which were signed with regulator Arcom (fka CSA) at the end of December.

The final steps came with the revamp of film media windowing alongside a specific Netflix trade agreement, struck with French cinema organisations in February.

Speaking at a panel organised by French funding body the National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image (CNC) in February, Roch-Olivier Maistre, president of Arcom – which changed its name from CSA while also seeing its power extended to digital players – said the move would “bring between €250m and €300m to French production this year and it will be dynamic as it is based on revenues.” Maistre also highlighted that more streamers are launching in the country, meaning further revenue raising.

Netflix alone said it will invest €200m (\$222m) this year and committed €40m to theatrical feature films production through its trade agreement. Prime Video revenues are difficult to estimate, but Amazon and Arcom agreed together on a €40m yearly investment.

Ahead of the curve

France has been ahead of the European curve on introducing the changes and Maistre said that his organisation is now sharing information between the various European regulators, with a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) having been agreed with Irish colleagues.

So far, only 11 out of 27 European countries have implemented production obligations, but, aside from Italy, they have introduced much smaller investment targets for the streamers. “France mobilised itself as much as it has because the continuation of our funding system was threatened,” said Jean-Baptiste Gourdin, director-general of media and cultural industries for France’s ministry of culture.

“It was vital to establish an industrial equity between players. The rate of 20% is not disproportionate nor unjustified, it represents only 1% of Netflix’s total €17bn investment, whereas the weight of French subscribers is 4%.”

Balance between players

Indeed, as the home of ‘exception culturelle’, France is probably one of the most protective countries in the world, with broadcasters heavily regulated themselves. “We looked to re-balance the whole, implementing a principle of equity rather than uniformity,” Gourdin explained.

“That is not the same as an outlet carrying almost only scripted fare and a more generalist channel building a diversified schedule [across a variety of genres, including news and sports].”

The new decrees will also see terrestrial networks with a generalist schedule having to invest a minimum of between 12.5% and 15% of revenues into audiovisual works (drama, animation and documentaries). That is less than the 16% being asked of scripted-driven platforms, while premium movie pay-TV channels, which comparatively run less scripted TV fare, have to invest just 6%.

However, the latter has to invest 12-16% in theatrical movies because it is their main fare, while platforms’ movie investment obligation is just 4% and generalist terrestrials face 3.2%. Altogether, generalist terrestrials have an obligation to invest 16-18%, against the 20% for streamers, and 18-22% for premium pay-TV.

The regulation also includes the possibility to negotiate with producers unions, as Gourdin explained, with the aim being to leave room for trade negotiations. “Models are changing, it would have been impossible to freeze everything in stone,” he says.

Lupin (opposite page), is produced by Gaumont, whose revenues jumped by 73% after its move into series, while the CNC panel (right) highlighted how the new regulation would bring up to €300m to French production this year

Windows & rights

One of the trickiest negotiations was around the windowing of platforms’ theatrical films, which in France is regulated by a trade agreement meant to protect cinema. As a pay-TV channel, Canal+, which is the biggest French movie financier, managed to negotiate a six-month window after theatrical release (down from eight months).

That is against an improved €200m annual investment that remains well ahead of the SVOD platforms. The new arrangement also means Canal+ was able to secure first run rights to Paramount movies as part of an exclusive agreement, which also includes Paramount+ distribution.

SVOD windows, meanwhile, were set at 17 months (instead of 36), followed by free-to-air channels at 22 and AVOD at 36. Netflix negotiated its own deal on a shorter 15-month window, against a number of guarantees including budget diversity.

There is also now additional legislation on rights ownership. Streamers must dedicate two-thirds of their audiovisual works investment to independent production (a figure that rises to three-quarters for feature films) and there are strict rules governing ownership: no shareholding interest; no co-production shares or distribution mandates; no more than 36 months of exclusive rights; and no more than 72 months of rights altogether.

“We made the structural decision to stand by independent producers, so they can continue to build up their own assets and not just become service companies,” Gourdin said.

“People don’t realise that we own less than a quarter of our European works, it’s a very small amount,” said Madeleine de Cock Buning, Netflix’s VP of public policy for EMEA. Cock Buning added that a variety of deals are available according to the producer’s profile, such as its home country, whether it’s a new company and if it is able to invest itself.

She also highlighted that the streamer has invested €4bn in Europe over the past three years, building relationships with around 300 producers. Netflix intends to do more, she added, not because of regulation, but because of motivation. If it does not keep its producers happy then they will not work for Netflix, she stressed.

“People don’t realise that we own less than a quarter of our European works, it’s a very small amount”

Madeleine de Cock Buning,
Netflix





Slates & opportunities

These words have been backed up by action. Netflix recently presented its 2022 slate including a number of big budget series and genres that traditional broadcasters cannot afford, such as action.

Amazon is already quite active in high-end drama too, while Disney+ has launched its first French family-friendly shows, including comedy *Weekend Family* and supernatural and mystery teen series *Parallèles*, diversifying the scope further.

In animation, streamers also offer great opportunities and, as Xilam's Marc du Pontavice said in February, they enable global reach. "Psychologically, that is a huge change," he said, especially because children normally have fewer cultural barriers. Streamers are also opening up a new market for animation aimed at 15-35-year olds: French animation producers have long been looking to target this demographic but were lacking commissioners and strands to do so.

From a creative aspect, the outlook seems positive but concerns have been voiced by some that streamer commissions are in danger of now becoming too local in terms of subject matter, with French firms only producing documentaries about France, for instance.

TV producer unions also questioned the genre diversity criteria. And while the requirements are likely to drive drama as a whole, there are fears that big scripted series such as *Lupin* concentrate most investment.

It is also worth noting that Arcom, which admitted it wanted to move quickly in order to not miss another year, asked platforms to commit to two genres each. Two agreed for animation obligations (4.4% for Netflix and 3.5% for Disney+), while Amazon Prime Video chose instead to focus on performing arts (3%) and documentaries (3%).

Disney+ and Netflix also committed to documentaries, but with much smaller investment amounts of 1.5% and 0.6% respectively, which offended some doc producers. According to unions, that makes a total of €3m for the genre, including just €1m at Netflix, less than the platform's current spending.

These are also minimum targets and as if to show that documentaries are part of its plans, Netflix presented three projects (including two series) as part of the 12 mentioned in March. The streamer also had the doc executives posing on the team picture.

Disney+ supernatural teen mystery series *Parallèles* (left) is one of the streamer's first family-friendly French shows, with a budget out of reach of most broadcasters

Deal evolution

Most producers say it is too early to evaluate the effects of the new regulations on independent production quotas and on deal models.

The CNC is going to adapt its grant system so producers can apply for funding for shows that are being co-produced but not fully funded by streamers. It has also introduced an experimental fund, which selected its first three projects in December – a drama, an animation and a documentary, but it is not willing to comment further before the experiment concludes in April.

The CNC also points out that it is already possible for producers to apply for grants when a show involves both a traditional French broadcaster and a streamer, a model used several times. France Télévisions recently came onboard a couple of streamer shows, one of which is for Amazon.

Competition & consolidation

If there's a lack of euphoria among TV producers given the new rules, it may well be because of the fiercely competitive market and the fast-paced M&A activity. Driven by streamer's cinematographic creative approach, more movie producers are entering series production. Many Netflix shows are, for instance, produced by feature film producers, companies that either diversified long ago into TV such as Gaumont, or more recently, such as Films du Kiosque, which is responsible for two major Netflix series, *Family Business* and Fanny Herero's *Drôle*.

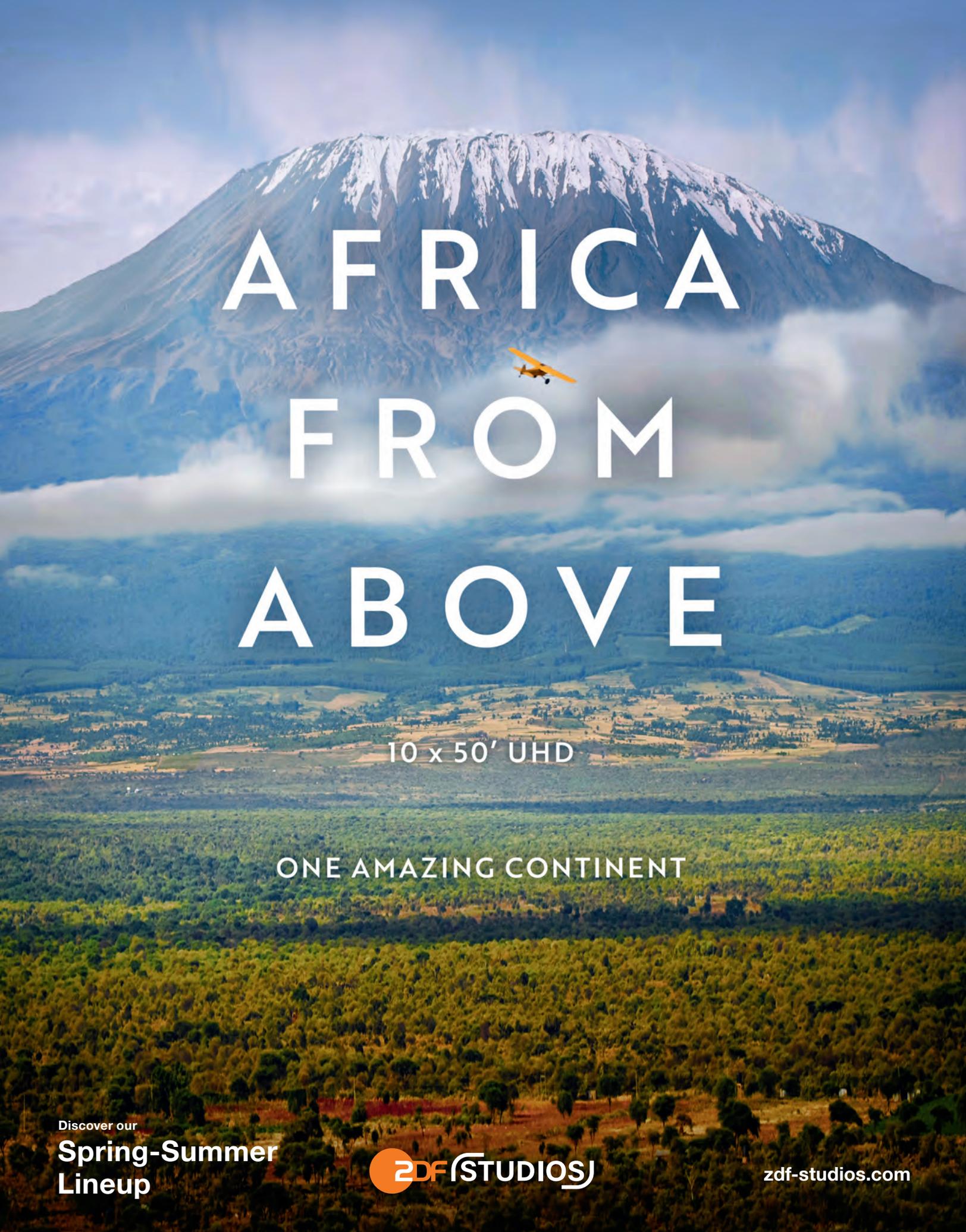
Gaumont 2021 revenues jumped 73% to €266m thanks to series, delivering 14 TV shows including Amazon's animation *Do, Re & Mi* and spy series *Totems*, alongside new seasons of *Narcos Mexico* and German series *Barbarians* for Netflix. It is also shooting a new season of *Lupin*.

Elsewhere, Banijay has partnered with Alain Goldman, while Mediawan bought a majority stake in Chi-Fou-Me, producer of 2021 theatrical hit, *BAC Nord*.

While there has been much focus on streaming, producers are also increasingly looking at how market changes will affect their traditional domestic landscape, namely with the potential merger of TF1 and M6.

The issue of IP remains hot too. Broadcaster's production obligations have relaxed, with the rate required from 'independents' standing at two-thirds. The possibility to own co-production shares kicks in once broadcasters fund over 50% of a budget, as does the opportunity to secure so-called '360 digital rights'. To qualify as an 'independent' commission, however, broadcasters are restricted to taking distribution rights, although that can be negotiated through trade agreements.

On top of all this, president Emmanuel Macron recently announced that if he is re-elected this April, he will remove French pubcasters' licence fees, adding that he intends funding to be replaced. Despite the new laws governing streamers, the flux of the French market continues apace. **TBI**



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Dreaming big

Everybody knows about *Squid Game*, but how much do you know about the TV industry that created it? Nick Edwards takes a deep dive into South Korea's production industry and finds out what makes it tick

By the far the 'buzziest' show of 2021 was Netflix's comic-book like dystopian thriller *Squid Game*. Following in the footsteps of the surprise Oscar-winning film *Parasite*, and formats, such as *The Masked Singer*, the show confirmed beyond doubt South Korea's status as a potent hotbed of creativity.

"The Korean market is like a hot furnace now," says Ki-hyuk Lee, chief strategy officer of *Ghost Doctor* and *Twenty-Five Twenty-One* producer Studio Dragon. Underlining the point, Netflix invested around \$500m in Korean content last year, while local media giant CJ ENM is to spend \$4.4bn over the next five years and streamer Wavve (known for *SF8* and *Mtopia*) said it would be spending \$884m by 2025.

Dreams of making it big are inspiring young actors, directors and writers from all over Asia to descend on South Korea as they do to LA in America. "Traditional media operators, new operators and creative people are being drawn in from Korea and other countries," says Ki-hyuk Lee.

Korea's export legacy

Beneath the flashy headlines, however, Korea's scripted industry is a far more nuanced space. Shows such as *Squid Game* and its follow up, *Hellbound*, are the exception rather than the rule. Most are family, rom-com and specifically 'relationship-based' dramas. The majority of traditional Korean TV drama is directly comparable to the standard primetime fare offered on all free-to-air and linear channels in Europe and around the world.

This traditional style of Korean TV drama has been sold to other parts of Asia, Latin America and the Middle-East for years. *Squid Game*, meanwhile, was famously rejected multiple times before Netflix agreed to make it. Even in countries such as the UK, where the show was one of the most talked about of 2021, the various conflicting methods of gathering viewing figure metrics make it hard to establish whether or not it was more or less popular than the classic primetime shows on traditional outlets (such as the BBC or ITV).

What is clear is that millennial audiences, particularly in Europe and North America, and the global streamers who cater to them, want the next high-end genre-breaking K-drama. The kind of content that sits perfectly alongside Netflix's other hits, such as *Stranger Things* (US), *Sex Education* (UK) and *Dark* (Germany).

"What we're seeing with Korean drama is what we've already seen from other international markets," says Ken Kim, CEO of Webtoon US, whose digital comics include *Hellbound* and *All Of Us Are Dead*, which have both been adapted as series for Netflix.

"There are a number of reasons for this shift, but great storytelling is the key; new technology and distribution wouldn't matter if people weren't captivated by the content. The most important connecting thread between *Squid Game* and *Parasite* isn't that they're both Korean: it's that they're both incredible stories."

Complexity & nuance

The reasons why traditional and the new wave of K-dramas are enjoyed by global audiences – despite the presence of unfamiliar actors and cultures – are the same.

"People like Korean drama because there's always a character the audience can confide in and it's not necessarily the main character," says Deborah Youn, head of business in Asia for CJ ENM-owned Echo Rights, which distributes titles such as *Mouse* and *Hometown*.

Sol Lee of international distributor KT Alpha – which houses *Mission Possible* and *The Man From Nowhere*, among others – agrees. "Most Korean series have a unique point of view which is not only focused on a hero or heroine," she says. In *Squid Game*, there are many different characters, and audiences around the world like and identify with different ones.

Another key feature of K-drama is that while "there's always a good character and an evil character," continues Youn, "the evil character always has a backstory that explains how they became evil." This resonates with the world view for many. "People in general see the good in people and that it's their social circumstances that make them this way," she says.

"In general, South Korean drama is more complex, the characters are more complex and they have more complex relationships. The pace is really fast and shows often feature more complex storytelling devices such as time lapses," says Nicola Söderlund, managing partner at Echo Rights, acquired by CJ ENM in 2018.

"You can't watch it while doing the dishes. If you miss two minutes of dialogue in K-drama you won't know what's going on," adds Youn. The sophisticated

"The most important connecting thread between *Squid Game* and *Parasite* isn't that they're both Korean: it's that they're both incredible stories"

Ken Kim,
Webtoon



Opposite, Apple TV+ series *Pachinko* may up-end the status quo with its use of multiple languages

writing can, in some ways, create a barrier to adapting K-drama abroad however.

“It’s sometimes a challenge for European writers to adapt, but when succeeding it could also be very rewarding,” says Söderlund.

Pachinko’s potential

While Korean drama is booming, the chance to work directly with English-speaking countries on co-productions remains limited. “Co-production is not really that active right now but the opportunities are still open,” says Lee.

Additionally, a Korean drama won’t be of interest to a local broadcaster unless “99% of it is in the Korean language,” says Youn. “Only the global streamers would consider [anything different].” The success of Apple TV+’s upcoming *Pachinko* – based on a British novel with a narrative that switches between Korean, Japanese and English – therefore could be pivotal in changing the current status quo.

There are other challenges on taking Korean dramas global, too. The standard run of a K-drama on TV is long in comparison to most English-language series, with around 16 episodes. Fitting such a format into standardised schedules is another barrier to selling K-drama abroad.



Hometown and other K-dramas like it offer viewers clear-cut heroes and villains

Much more problematic, however, is the fact that Korean stories are self-contained. Story, character arcs, everything, all finish at the end of the first season – the exact opposite to the returning series model that has been consumed by much of the rest of the globe for over two decades. There are a few exceptions, such as Studio Dragon’s crime thriller *Voice*, now in its fourth season, but these are rare.

Attempting to break this tradition is economically very difficult. Almost a decade ago, it became legal for private companies to own pay-TV channels. In those days, in common with much of the rest of the world, actors didn’t want to be in a TV series because they were looked down upon in comparison to cinema.

The result was that private companies hugely increased actors’ fees. The shows became successful, not only in Korea but in other countries too – but those high wages set a precedent. Today, A-List actors are booked up 2-3 years in advance, so to make a returning series, a producer would likely have to break actors’ contracts, something that would blow the budget of almost all shows.

Squid Game, which was also originally written as one season, has been commissioned for a second season – Netflix’s deep pockets may explain the rare exception to this rule.

Writing & rates

Like successful actors, top tier writers are also paid very well, closer to US showrunners than standard European rates, and most will write a new show every couple of years. A common practice, after receiving 30-40% of the advance, is to go on holiday for a few months to get inspired, before returning to write the project.

Amanda Groom, MD of The Bridge

The Bridge’s Amanda Groom has been working with Korea and across Asia for more than a decade. Here, she offers her advice to those wanting to build ties with the country’s TV industry.

“Korea set out determinedly to secure its place on the world stage. When I first approached international broadcasters about working with Korea it was hard to secure a meeting. It’s not now! The country has its own unique voice and its original programming is punching through with extraordinary success. I would predict that we will continue to devour these unique, creative styles of programming from Korea in addition to increasing the ways in which we co-produce with the country’s leading creatives.

“There are numerous ways for international firms to partner with Korean production companies, broadcasters and streamers. However, working with Asia requires building long term relationships. Relationships are the key to all negotiations and partnerships and it can be challenging for smaller indies to dedicate the time necessary to building those relationships over the long term. That’s why I formed The Bridge, providing a short cut for broadcasters and producers enabling them to access many of the advantages of Asia without investing the time themselves.

“Developing drama with Asia enables international producers to bring innovative new stories to English-speaking markets, stories that shine new light on history between what was previously two worlds of east and west. The Bridge is currently co-developing two scripted dramas – fascinating human stories set within significant history touch points, revealing much about our world today. If you don’t know Asian history, it’s almost impossible to understand our world today and yet few of us do! We hope to change that.”



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“You can’t watch K-drama while doing the dishes – if you miss two minutes of dialogue, you won’t know what’s going on”

Deborah Youn,
Eccho Rights



Hellbound is just one of the Korean digital comics to have been adapted by Netflix

“Writers have a much more powerful position than in Europe,” says Söderlund. “If they don’t like a project, they just don’t do it. When you want to option a series, they can just say ‘no.’”

The few writers who are considered ‘top tier’ are treated like kings, or rather queens. “The majority are female,” says Youn. “Many formerly had conventional lives and just turned out to be very talented writers. Good writers are really hard to find and most stumbled on it by chance.”

The most common way to enter the industry is to submit a short script into one of the regularly held screenwriting contests held by local broadcasters. These organisations have training programs whereby newbie writers are paired up with established talents.

Baek Mi-kyung, the writer of two hugely successful shows for cable channel JTBC – whose studio division acquired *Mare Of Easttown* prodco Wiip from Creative Artists Agency last year – was formerly an English teacher who got her big break in her 40s. *Strong Girl Bong-soon* and *Lady In Dignity*, meanwhile, were hits at home and both now also reside on Netflix.

For young writers, one way in is to start as an assistant for top writers, but the most common advice given to them is “fall in love and get a day job,” says Youn. This is not as flippant as it might sound because Korean TV drama has such a strong emphasis on relationships and relatable experiences. “Most writers don’t make it until later in life, if you’re too young you won’t get hired,” says Youn.



Investment & risk

Content strategies throughout Korea’s media industry are now designed to attract local and global viewers alike. Last year, CJ ENM snapped up Endeavor Content (*Normal People*, *Killing Eve*, *Severance*) having already invested in Skydance Media, DreamWorks and The Ink Factory.

Cable operator JTBC, as discussed, bought a majority stake in *The White House Plumbers* and *Dickinson* firm Wiip, while internet giant Naver – owners of Webtoon – acquired Wattpad, the self-publishing site from which one of Netflix’s biggest hits, *The Kissing Booth*, was sourced.

The gaze of global audiences has upped the stakes of K-drama in unexpected ways too. Ancillary income sources can be tapped from platforms, such as YouTube, and other social media. The star of Netflix’s upcoming *The Sound Of Magic* (based on Webtoon’s *Anmarasumanara*), Ji Chang-wook, has 19 million Instagram followers. Product placement is huge. For Korean viewers spotting how brands insert themselves into K-drama is a pastime in itself. High-end fashion brands such as Tiffany and Cartier give exclusive pieces for popular actors to wear.

However, despite the rise in the prestige of Korean TV drama on the global stage, there has been a downside for the independent producers that initially turned the industry into such a success.

Because of the explosion in the cost of talent and production values, which have also sky-rocketed, a lot of independent production companies are now not making as much money as they used to. Writer and actor salaries can often take up to more than half of the budget. “Ten to 15 years ago, a margin of \$1m of pure profit was not uncommon for a hit show. Nowadays, a hit show does not even guarantee you will break even,” says Youn.

Increasingly, the Korean TV industry is becoming akin to the Hollywood model, whereby a studio might produce nine movies that don’t make their money back but the 10th is a huge hit that more than recoups the losses on the others.

Many independent producers, meanwhile, are bought up by large media organisations as a way to avoid bankruptcy. Recent entrants such as big spending Netflix can alleviate their debts and are keeping the wheels of the industry turning. “There is risk,” says Ki-hyuk Lee of Studio Dragon, but “this is a good time even for failure as the market is rapidly expanding.

“The efforts we put in to overcome [our] small market have resulted in the current global popularity of Korean dramas. I hope this mind-blowing investment will produce unexpected, great results likewise.” **TBI**

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Breaking the mould

Female-led drama has been on the rise for several years but there's an ongoing evolution around the types of stories now being brought to screen, writes Helen Dugdale

The Unusual Suspects is a female-led heist drama from female-led prodco Aquarius Films in Australia

In 2022, it seems odd that we're still applauding the rise in women taking charge in front and behind the camera. Surely it should just be the norm by now?

Claire Mundell, MD and creative director at Glasgow-based Synchronicity Films, believes the

demand is driven by global events. "It feels like the industry is finally catching up with the audience who, in a post #MeToo and BLM world, are demanding to hear as diverse a range of stories as possible."

More than half of Synchronicity Films' slate is written and executive produced by women. The



team have seen success adapting best-selling books by female novelists including *The Cry*, and are now working on the adaptation of Heather Morris' *The Tattooist Of Auschwitz* and *Bloody Women* by Helen Fitzgerald.

Endeavor Content, which is behind shows such as *Killing Eve*, says it constantly explores how audiences can have access to more stories from the female camp. "What we see on screen should be a reflection of the world we inhabit," says Liz Tang, director of content, "and with a world that is half female, it's about time we see more strong, diverse female-led characters and content."

"I wish female stories didn't still qualify as 'unexplored'," admits Chiara Cardoso, head of development at BlackBox Multimedia. "We are definitely in a better position, there are still so many unheard stories with women at the forefront, and we make a point to have a specific eye for those in particular."

Vicky Ryan, co-founder and COO, Rainmaker Content, which currently has two strong female-led dramas on their slate with *Amy Winter* and *The Bone Season*, says the stories just need to keep coming. "Female-led drama has been distinguished by its success for the last few years, with shows such as *Big Little Lies* and *The Handmaid's Tale*."

"Broadcasters have realised the majority of viewers are women and want to see their experiences played out on television. Women don't want to watch programming with no female authenticity – that alienates them. With stronger voices and greater access to the creative process, I hope we continue to see a healthy flow of strong female-led dramas."

Secret ingredient

Mundell, however, questions the reasons why the audience is asking for more dramas made by and featuring women. "It's hard, and perhaps a little misguided, to generalise about what makes female



Helen Fitzgerald's *Bloody Women* is one of the next books by a female novelist to be adapted by Synchronicity

"It isn't someone's gender that makes their work unique – it's their view of the world as an individual"

Claire Mundell,
Synchronicity Films



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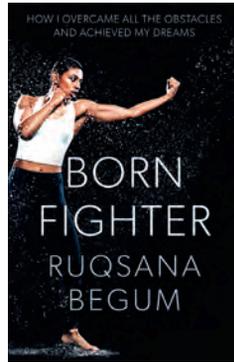
written and produced content unique.

“There’s as wide a range of taste, individuality and inspiration in work made by women as there is in work by men. It isn’t someone’s gender that makes their work unique – it’s their view of the world as an individual.”

Endeavor Content’s slate highlights this, with shows ranging from the final season of the iconic *Killing Eve*, to Amy Schumer’s *Life & Beth*, and the follow-up to *Normal People*, Sally Rooney’s adaptation of her hit novel, *Conversations With Friends*.

Tang also reveals details of her company’s first Cantonese-language series, *Dr. Cheung*. “We are seeing a lot more international-originating content made for the global stage, but not as many series with a female lead like this one,” she says.

“It’s a unique show that will leave audiences gripped by *Dr. Cheung* as she uses a combination of the hard facts of each case, alongside the answers



Ruqsana Begum’s *Born Fighter* is being adapted by BlackBox, while *Conversations With Friends* (below) is on Endeavor’s slate

provided by the criminals to glean beneath the surface and make decisions that will change the course of their fate forever.”

The louder calls for more female characters isn’t being ignored by commissioners. As Mundell highlights, audiences want to watch characters that intrigue them. “It’s a bit like life – we naturally want to hang out with characters we admire, who take us into their worlds and whose company we like being in. We want a second season of something because we want to be back with those characters again.”

BlackBox is working on the adaptation of Ruqsana Begum’s autobiography *Born Fighter*, the story of a Muslim woman in the UK who defeated all odds and became world champion of *Mai Tai*, having trained for years without her family knowing, overcoming chronic illnesses and the judgement of her community. “It talks about the real world, real communities, real experiences,” says Cardoso.



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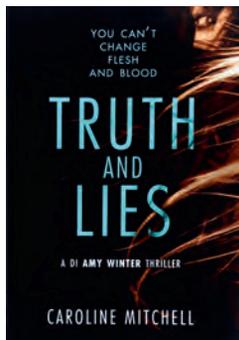
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Pandore (top) is on APC Studios's slate, while *Tribhanga* has been a hit for Netflix and Rainmaker is adapting the 'Amy Winters' books (bleow) for the screen



For Emmanuelle Guilbart, joint-CEO & founder at APC Studios, paying attention to female characters is part of the global need to rethink representation and to see different demographics take the lead and explore fresh perspectives through them.

“When it comes to women, it is not so much the lack of representation that needs to be tackled, but a continued misrepresentation. Women do not have to fit a certain mould, so we understand the need to have a range of characters with different personalities and approaches to life.

“This is how we have seen our content stand out in an ever-changing and growing marketplace, by telling stories with complex and realistic women at the heart of them, and with the women behind the camera reclaiming their voices and being in control of their storytelling.”

APC Studios' flagship show, *Keeping Faith*, has paved the way for other female-driven content from the team, including *The Unusual Suspects* and yet-to-air *Pandore* and *True Colours*.

The appetite for stories created by and starring women is also booming globally, including in India. Mrinalini Jain, EVP of business & content at Banijay Asia, says that in her market, characters “are being written better than ever before, with authenticity and honesty, and that’s a very welcome change.”

She adds: “We have seen a lot of female-driven cop thrillers and crime shows. One of Banijay Asia’s most recent female-driven successes is the film *Tribhanga*, produced for Netflix. Written and directed by well-known actor Renuka Shahane, the story is based on her own experiences with her mother.”

The crew effect

The suggestion that the global plethora of production companies governed by women is pushing the demand for more female-led drama onto channels and platforms isn’t a belief shared by everyone. Cardoso at BlackBox isn’t wholly convinced that only women can tell female stories.

“There is great value in having different points of view when telling any story. We always look to have a variety of voices in all of our projects – whether the projects are more male, or female-skewed.

“It also shouldn’t only be the responsibility of women to bring more females and other marginalised voices to the fore. Men must make use of their privilege and they have many opportunities to support this too.”

Guilbart is steadfast though in her belief that female crews tell stories differently and more truthfully. “They give authenticity to female representation and bring these new perspectives to the screen. It is exciting to see how our female creators do not shy away from any genre: *Pandore* as a political thriller wouldn’t have the same insight if it hadn’t been created, written, and directed by three women.”

The shift in power for women is also evident in India, as Banijay’s Jain sums up. “Behind the camera, women are using their voices to tell their own stories and they are developing characters that represent them.

“Those behind the narrative of the shows are bringing more empathy to characters, which makes them feel real. They are creating content they want to see and using their influence to bring audiences stories that need to be recognised.” **TBI**

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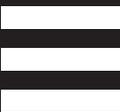


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Uncovering Paradys

South African drama is gaining international attention like never before. Richard Middleton talks to the creators of *Paradys* to find out about the story's unique, disturbing roots, its development strategy & its global potential

Paradys is in many ways the epitome of what a global drama is all about in 2022: a uniquely local story whose themes resonate worldwide.

The character-driven murder mystery is at its heart a crime story, but set in the South African desert town of Paradys. In some ways, the place is much like any small rural community in the country, except everyone is white.

Inspired by a real place in the Northern Cape called Orania, the show explores what happens when two black detectives are sent to the town to investigate a horrific murder, creating a canvas from which multiple themes are drawn out.

Roots & inspiration

“The show has its beginnings in 1994 with South Africa’s first elections,” explains co-creator Darrel Bristow-Bovey, who as a

journalist had been due to visit the town more than two decades ago.

That trip never occurred but the town remained firmly in Bristow-Bovey’s thoughts and those of many South Africans, he says. Years later, it again surfaced after a few drinks with friend and writer Anton Visser, and the pair set to work on creating a story against this most unusual of backgrounds.

“We were both so aware that there was this small corner of South Africa that no one really can get into, so we started exploring what would happen if two black cops were sent in and had the power to ask the questions – to be in a place where black people hadn’t been for 20 years.”

Visser had known of Orania for years, having grown up nearby, but he had never visited and knew little about its inner workings. So they decided to visit.

“We landed on a Friday night in a thunderstorm – all the omens were there,” he says, adding that the town presented “a friendly face”



on arrival. “We stayed for four days, though, and if you scratch under the surface of the *Pleasantville* veneer, you start to see what’s going on.

“It played into a kind of creepiness. Parts of the show are more confrontational and there was hostility, but there’s a whole other side that is much more insidious – that was a really interesting flavour that we came away with.”

Crime focus

While *Paradys* has been inspired by the town of Orania, it is first and foremost a crime drama, exploring the types of characters who would be attracted to live in such a place. “Many of the people who live there are racist and there’s such a strange psychology because they’re so unusual, plus there’s a religious spin too. It’s just an odd and creepy universe to visit.”

“It’s this weird place and when you’re in the surrounding towns, you speak of it in a hushed voice,” adds Bristow-Bovey. “You don’t know what’s going on inside.”

There were, however, elements of the visit that will be familiar

to potential viewers the world over, he adds. “The people who live there articulate themselves through the language not of racism but through the importance of belonging and protecting their cultural heritage,” Bristow-Bovey continues.

“We realised this is increasingly the language that gets used across the whole political spectrum around the world, in right and left circles,” he says, which “seems to be getting a disturbingly prominent place in politics.”

It is against this background that the show’s central storyline – that of two black detectives attempting to solve a murder – plays out.

“One of the main two characters is Ezekiel, an angry, probably justifiably embittered and potentially violent person who has been damaged by the apartheid years. And he himself believes in a kind of separateness, a kind of exclusionary nationalism, so with that character and the town we can show a dialogue between two sides.

“These two nationalisms come face to face, but we hope to mediate that with the second police officer, who, while angry, is a more conciliatory character and occupies a go-between role.”

Status & ambitions

The show is in development as an eight-parter with South Africa’s Quizzical Pictures, while Keshet International (KI) came onboard as global distribution and production partner in February.

Bristow-Bovey has written the script, principally in English but with some Afrikaans, because the people of *Paradys* only speak that language, while “story beats” were developed via Zooms with Visser during the pandemic.

“Anton planted the seed and then we met in the dining room of my home in Cape Town and beat out the pilot – there were some wrangles over how, in particular, it should end.”

Bristow-Bovey and Visser then “thrashed” through the remaining episodes, with an array of storylines and structures now in place. “We have it almost entirely complete and in our heads,” Bristow-Bovey says.

The show was the winner of last month’s Series Mania 2022 Co-Pro Pitch competition, receiving a prize of €50,000 (\$55,000), and Quizzical Pictures’s Nimrod Geva says the ambition now is to secure further development funding to finesse the scripts.

“We are looking for partners and talking to talent to attach to the project,” he says, adding that John Trengove (*Manodrome*) is onboard to direct. The hope is that the show will be shot “in a picturesque semi-desert area of South Africa,” and Geva says he is open to all types of partners.

“We are looking for someone who is bold, who is brave and not afraid to tell a story as it is,” he says. “That may be a public broadcaster or a streamer that is looking to make a big splash to say, ‘we’ve arrived’ – someone looking for edgier content. [South African drama] has definitely come up in recent years, so it’s a good time to get something like this off the ground.”

“I love that we are smashing together supposedly two polar opposites who are always at each others’ throats,” says Visser. “By putting them in one arena, we hope to be able to explore more about this country.” **TBI**

Scripted Hot Picks

Our selection of the most exciting, dramatic and thrilling scripted shows heading to market

Django

Producers: Atlantique Productions & Cattleya

Distributor: StudioCanal

Broadcasters: Sky, Canal+

Logline: Reimagining of the classic Western about a man searching for his missing daughter, following the murder of his family years earlier

This reimagining of the classic 1960s Western stars Matthias Schoenaerts as the eponymous Django, along with award-winning actress Noomi Rapace.

Set in the Wild West in the 1860s and 1870s, Django is a man haunted by the murder of his family eight years earlier, and is still looking for his daughter Sarah, believing that she may have survived.

“*Django* has a captivating storyline with a contemporary and psychological twist as well as a unique feminist angle – all of which create a major shift in the narrative and challenges the standards of the genre,” reveals Beatriz Campos, SVP of global sales and production financing at StudioCanal.

Explaining how the 10 x 60-minute series updates Django’s story from previous adaptations, she adds: “We are able to dig much deeper into the complexity of Django’s character than earlier feature films, including his never-before-seen backstory.”

Shocked to finally find Sarah alive and well in the city of New Babylon, Django does not however get the reunion he expected or hoped for.

Sarah, now a grown woman and about to be married, wants Django to leave, as she fears he will put New Babylon in jeopardy if he stays.

However, Django, believing that the city is in danger, is adamant that he will not lose his daughter twice.

“This is the next major partnership between Canal+ and Sky Europe – one of their most ambitious productions to date,” says Campos, sharing the show’s global potential.

“Even though it is set in the Wild West in the 1860s and ‘70s and is designed to show an accurate representation of the period, *Django* is definitely a story of our time.

“Celebrating multiculturalism, minorities and the value of family – it is a story of how disparate people can unite to survive against all odds.”

Top
Pick







True Colours

Producer: Bunya Productions
Distributor: APC Studios
Broadcasters: SBS Australia
Logline: An Aboriginal detective returns to her childhood community to investigate a suspicious car accident

Australian drama following the story of Aboriginal detective Toni Alma (Rarriwuy Hick), who is assigned to investigate a suspicious car accident in Perdar Theendar – the community she left as a child and has had little to do with since.

As the investigation unfolds, Alma must “navigate the fine line between respect for her community and its traditions, and maintaining professional standards as a detective, which constantly puts her in an impossible position,” reveals

Laurent Boissel, joint-CEO and founder of APC Studios.

And as the case begins to point towards her own family, Alma must reckon with a killer who is too close to home.

Boissel adds that the 4 x 60-minute crime drama offers fans of the genre something they haven’t seen before, but will nonetheless be very relatable.

“Shot in a high-end cinematic style and set in the Australian Outback, it focuses on a crime being investigated by a female First Nations detective, and exposes audiences to the rich complexity of an Aboriginal community never explored from this perspective.

“Growing up part of two cultures, Toni is a woman who grapples with finding balance in her sense of identity and where she fits in the world. That sense of not quite fitting and that search of belonging is something audiences globally can relate to.”

Rogue Heroes

Producers: Kudos & Nebulastar
Distributor: Banijay Rights
Broadcaster: BBC One, BBC iPlayer, EPIX
Logline: Dramatised account of how the British army’s elite special forces unit, the SAS, was formed under extraordinary circumstances in the darkest days of the Second World War

Based on Ben Macintyre’s book *SAS: Rogue Warriors*, this 6 x 60-minute drama recounts the true-life story of David Stirling, an eccentric young officer, whose actions lead to the creation of the British Army’s SAS (Special Air Service) during the Second World War.

Hospitalised after a training exercise gone wrong and convinced that traditional commando units don’t work, Stirling creates a radical plan that flies in the face of all accepted rules of warfare at the

time. He fights for permission to recruit the toughest, boldest, and brightest soldiers to create a small undercover unit that will create mayhem behind enemy lines; more rebels than soldiers.

“David Stirling is simply such a compelling character – a brilliant but brutal, eccentric, complicated and utterly driven man. While the show doesn’t dwell on his backstory, it does allow a glimpse into his vulnerability coupled with an insane bravery,” reveals Matt Creasey, EVP of sales,

acquisitions and co-productions at Banijay Rights.

Developed for TV and written by *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight and directed by Tom Shankland (*The Serpent*), the cast is lead by Connor Swindells, Jack O’Connell and Alfie Allen.

“There is a swagger in *Rogue Heroes* which hasn’t been seen

in a World War Two series,” enthuses Creasey.

“Steven Knight and Tom Shankland are brilliant at making period dramas feel incredibly contemporary and have brought to life an untold story that has only previously been seen in documentaries and history books.”



The Porter

Producers: Sienna Films & Inferno Pictures

Distributor: Abacus Media Rights

Broadcasters: CBC

Logline: Explosive drama based on real events about the civil rights movement on the railroads in 1920s America

Inspired by real events, this 8 x 60-minute drama series takes place in the Black community of St. Antoine, Montreal, in 1921.

First World War brothers-in-arms Junior Massey and Zeke Garrett are held in high regard in their community as train porters – an often-demeaning job with long hours, low pay and gruelling conditions, but the best that was available to a Black man at the time.

When a fellow porter is killed on the job due to railway negligence, Junior and Zeke find themselves unlikely leaders on

opposing paths to a better life.

“Through the story of the porters’ struggle to organise a union, the series examines issues of how capitalism fuels race and class divides,” reveals Jennifer Kawaja, executive producer on the series for Sienna Films. “Other issues the series handles include the debate of individualism vs collectivism, feminism and sexual orientation within the Black communities at the time. While all of these issues reflect what the characters would face at the time, they remain extremely relevant to

contemporary audiences.”

Kawaja tells TBI that the series, which is set in the “golden age of rail travel,” combines fact and fiction to explore these real issues and has “no shortage” of global appeal.

“Far from a dry look at a historical period and events, the series uses real history as a basis

to explore engaging, multi-dimensional characters with universally appealing stories in an accessible way,” she says.

“The series celebrates their struggle rather than wallows in their defeats. *The Porter’s* themes of family, belonging, and ambition will also resonate with an international audience.”



Stories To Stay Awake

Producers: Prointel Producciones, Isla Audiovisual, ViacomCBS International Studios

Distributor: ZDF Studios

Broadcasters: Amazon Prime Video (Spain) & RTVE

Logline: Four Spanish directors revive the horror anthology with a series of standalone spine-chilling tales

Spanish directors Rodrigo Cortés, Rodrigo Sorogoyen, Paula Ortiz and Paco Plaza have revived Chicho Ibáñez Serrador’s classic 1960s horror anthology series for a new generation.

This 4 x 50-minute series will deliver four standalone tales that give homage to the past of the horror genre while adding a “modern cinematic edge.”

“Fifty years after its premiere, *Stories To Stay Awake* (*Historias Para No Dormir*) returns to the screen with a fresh take on a cult classic of the suspense genre. The directors faithfully re-envision the most memorable stories from Serrador’s anthology for today’s audiences, and in the

process create a tribute to the historical importance of the series, and its influence on their careers,” reveals Susanne Frank, VP of drama at ZDF Studios.

All episodes tackle different subjects with different issues, but sharing the common thread of horror and suspense.

“Whether it is a mysterious autonomous puppet or an opening hole in the asphalt, you are hooked on the narrative and storytelling until the end,” says Frank, adding that the series takes the best of the original stories and adapts them to the “topics and narrative of today, but keeping the spirit of psychological dread.”



Mixed mediums

Streamers have helped to propel documentaries to new audiences, in particular enticing younger viewers. Richard Middleton discovers how this is affecting what's on screen

Few disagree that documentary filmmakers are in the midst of a rich vein of form, arguably the medium's most prolific ever. And it is streamers that seem to be providing much of the rocket fuel.

"I've always been a doc fanatic, but I think we're truly experiencing a renaissance in the form right now," says Danny Gabai, EVP & head of Vice Studios US. "There have obviously been break-out docs over the years before the streaming era – *Bowling For Columbine*, *Amy*, *Senna* and others – but those were generally exceptions in a world where most docs were seen by hardcore doc fans.

"Now, we're in a place where everyone watches docs – which means more demand for more stories, larger audiences and greater resources."

Flee uses animation to recreate the real life journey of an Afghan refugee

Streamer supplements

It is this combination that seems to be propelling docs into myriad new directions from an artistic point of view. Budgets are bigger, audiences are greater and viewers are, in the main, younger and open to new ways of consuming content on screen.

"Through the streamers, we're seeing new audiences discover a love for documentaries which is really thrilling and provides significant opportunities," says Femke Wolting, co-founder & CEO of Netherlands-based Submarine.

"I think we're living in a golden era for documentaries; there are so many new storytelling possibilities and new forms of visual storytelling for filmmakers to explore, such as mixing animation



and documentary or blurring the line between documentary and fiction. It's definitely an exciting time to make documentaries."

Rick Murray, MD of Workerbee, which was behind Lifetime's *Janet Jackson* and Discovery+ show *Save Our Beautiful Game*, says the proliferation of scripted content has also helped the doc medium and powered more investment into unscripted.

"You will always have the trashy end of fact-ent, but when it comes to docs – and the types of docs that always felt more like a movie, anyway – they are getting closer and closer to scripted," he says.

There are also more prosaic reasons why more money is being put into docs, as Murray points out. SVOD commissioners know that docs can in some cases provide much more bang for their buck than drama, particularly as scripted costs skyrocket.

That doesn't mean that doc budgets haven't increased since streamers entered the market – they have – but the average cost of a doc is still relatively small next to the cost of a single episode of premium European or North American drama. £1m (\$1.3m) on a doc can go a long way, Murray highlights.

Getting animated

This uptick in budgets is opening creative avenues for filmmakers, such as adding more dramatisation or incorporating animation. It is by no means a new phenomenon of course: as Gabai points out, *Nanook Of The North* used re-enactments and it was made in 1922, while Les Films d'Ici's *Waltz With Bashir* trailblazed the potential of animated docs almost 15 years ago.

But the trend for richer, multi-medium docs is surging and it is not just streamers behind the drive. In France, Arte has been a key proponent, perhaps most notably with its recent festival success *Flee*, which was created by Jonas Poher Rasmussen and produced by Gabai's Vice Studios. It follows the journey of an Afghan refugee, while other Arte shows to incorporate animation include Rithy Panh's new feature *Everything Will Be OK*.

Submarine, meanwhile, is not new to animation – its 2014 doc *Last Hijack* used the medium to visualise the life of a young pirate in Somalia. "This included his subjective memories of war, his dreams and his fears," says Wolting, "sometimes animation is used to re-enact elements that can't be filmed, in the same way another director might use live-action reconstructions."

Gabai adds that it can also provide "a different way" to tell a story. "Animation can portray things that are physically impossible in a live-action world. It can represent a character's mental headspace and interior experience in a physical way.

"It can also help simplify the visual portrayal of a world in a way that can help make a more universal connection to a story for audiences, and a deeper emotional connection to your characters.

"Audiences don't want to just hear someone telling a story – they want to experience it. And you don't always have access to archive or vérité footage to visualise how an event played out. If you didn't have cameras rolling when a part of the story played out, it's the next best option."

Dramatic intervention

Drama is also being increasingly incorporated into docs, sometimes because a talking head or library footage isn't available, but also because doc directors simply want to.

"Docs are sat next to scripted and you can pick between the two on streaming services," says Murray, a fact that encourages doc filmmakers to make their shows as slick to watch as a high-end drama.

TBI spoke to several producers who said that major streamers such as Discovery+, ahead of its merger with

"Animation can portray things that are physically impossible in a live-action world. Audiences don't just want to hear someone telling a story – they want to experience it"

Danny Gabai,
Vice Studios US



Rick Murray, MD of *Janet Jackson* producer Workerbee, says documentaries are coming to resemble scripted content



“Through the streamers, we’re seeing new audiences discover a love for documentaries, which provides significant opportunities”

Femke Wolting,
Submarine



WarnerMedia, is briefing for drama docs, as they look to blur the lines between scripted and non-scripted.

Wolting adds that the growing use of dramatisation is also partly down to “very savvy” viewers. “With so many titles being released weekly, to stand out in the crowd you have to make films that appeal both visually and also in terms of storytelling.

“Dramatisations are used to make content more cinematic and sometimes have more production value, and they are often filmed and edited in the same way a scripted project would be.”

Supporting this trend is the ongoing transition of movie directors shifting to docs – Murray points to Kevin McDonald, who worked on hit movies such as *The Last King Of Scotland* before leading Workerbee’s *Janet Jackson* doc – but the scripted incursion is also being made easier by camera technology, and specifically, its price.

“The cost of tech in shooting has come right down,” Murray says, “so cameras that we can use now will look premium and are as good as they might use on a scripted production. Ten years ago, we weren’t using cameras that had shallow depth of field so it couldn’t look like a drama – now we are.”

Workerbee did exactly this – “atmospheric recons”, as Murray puts it – for *Gang Wars* on Paramount’s UK network Channel 5. While it’s not a doc, but a

series, the combination with drone footage allowed more dramatisation to be incorporated, signalling perhaps how the premiumisation of docs might also soon be felt in series.

There are critics who sneer at the merging of mediums in docs, while others point to ‘over dramatisations’ that might tug away at a factual show’s integrity. But as Gabai points out, the key is in the person behind the camera.

“There aren’t downsides to mixed medium docs if you have a thoughtful, honest filmmaker who is just looking to create a deeper connection between the characters, the story and the audience,” he says, before reflecting on what brought about his passion for docs in the first place.

“Decades before the doc boom, I knew many filmmakers who would point to Errol Morris’ *The Thin Blue Line* as one of the films that inspired them to get into the medium. *Waltz With Bashir* was 14 years ago and was the main reason I was always looking to get involved in an animated doc.

“And Jonas Poher Rasmussen was able to create such a deep humanistic connection between the audience and his subject with our film *Flee*. It’s an achievement on the level of Ozu and Renoir.”

It is also likely to be engaging the next generation of documentarians as the medium continues its evolution. **TBI**

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Our selection of the hottest and most fascinating factual programming heading to market at MIPTV

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Pick

Radioactive Forest 10 Years After

Producer: NHK & CuriosityStream

Distributor: NHK Enterprises (NEP)

Broadcaster: N/A

Logline: Exploring the return of people and nature to the region of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident

The nuclear accident at Fukushima in Japan, in March 2011, destroyed the region's natural environment and many people's livelihoods. Tens of thousands of residents had to leave their homes and have yet to return. Some of the farms and villages are now gone.

This documentary depicts the 10-year odyssey of residents and scientists who are trying to find a way back to normality. With 4K footage of the region's flourishing wildlife, it reveals the helplessness of humankind and the greatness of nature.

"What we saw in a deserted town was beyond our imagination. Houses where families had once lived happily were now covered with greenery, and wild animals were walking around freely. The place had begun to turn into part of the forest," reveals NHK program director Shotaro Fujimatsu.

"As media professionals living at this time, we felt we had a duty to give future generations a

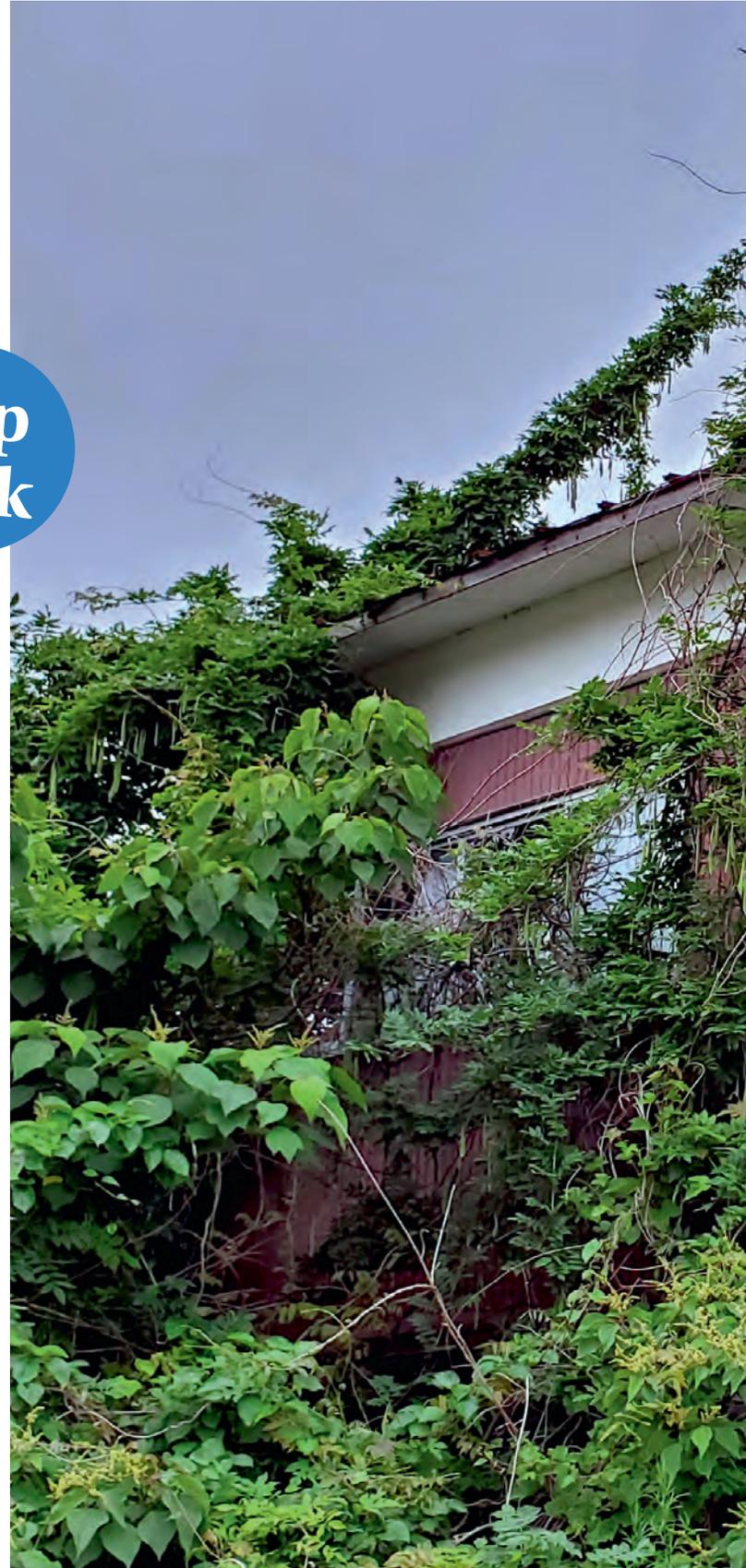
record of the forests and animals that live as silent witnesses to the nuclear accident and of the changes in towns that now have no human inhabitants."

Filming nature and wildlife always takes time, but this project came with some very specific challenges.

"We were only able to stay for short periods because of high radiation. So it was extremely difficult to film an authentic record of the animals' ecology with only our own crew and nobody to help us as a guide," explains NHK's principal program director Akira Kanda.

"The situation is even more challenging in what the Japanese authorities call 'difficult-to-return' zones. It's only possible to film during periods permitted by the local government."

Kanda adds: "We were astonished that the huge changes caused by the absence of humans were so quick. The rural landscape, which had been preserved by human intervention, was truly fragile."







Crisis In Cocaine Valley

Producer: Maximus Films

Distributor: Quintus Studios

Broadcaster: N/A

Logline: A look at how Covid impacted the Peruvian cocaine trade and what the far-reaching consequences have been

In the Peruvian Andes, deep in the rainforest, is the Cocaine Valley – the largest production site of the drug in the world. Every month, 200 laboratories used to produce several tons of the drug. Then came the Covid-19 pandemic, and a most

unexpected consequence of the global crisis – the threat to cocaine’s entire existence.

With exclusive access to key players in the region, this 1 x 60-minute documentary ventures through rivers and the deepest jungles to track down

abandoned and active cocaine pools and drug labs to uncover the impact on the drug trade.

“Sadly, cocaine is still very much prevalent in many parts of the world and something that was once a party drug for the privileged is now more affordable to the many. But the story of where it comes from, how it is produced and by whom is less known,” explains Adam Jacobs, creative director at Quintus Studios.

“This documentary opens our eyes to the bigger picture of not only cocaine production, but the wider context of what the industry means not only for regular people but a city as whole, and the repercussions when it, like so many others suffers at the hands of a worldwide phenomenon.”

From the coco farmers to the cartels, this film explores the impact of the pandemic on all levels of the cocaine trade.

Black West

Producer: CAPA

Distributor: Drive

Broadcaster: Arte

Logline: Documentary exploring how Black people were erased from the mythology of the American West, and the roles they played in its history

While most will be familiar with the image of John Wayne or Clint Eastwood riding through the Wild West, this one-off documentary explores the widely unacknowledged truth that in 1875, one in four American cowboys was Black.

“The film will open our eyes to this hidden reality: there were African-Americans in the Wild West. There is even a Black Calamity Jane, that is to say an adventurous woman who succeeded in surviving and imposing herself, rifle in hand, in a world of men. Hollywood

erased these heroes and heroines from history, our film gives them back their voice,” reveals Benjamin Sarrat, MD of distribution & co-production at the doc’s producer CAPA.

Pieced together from archives, re-enactments and first-hand historical accounts, *Black West* aims to restore these figures to their rightful place in history.

“Perhaps one of the most surprising things is that what is considered the most important western of all time, John Ford’s *The Searchers*, is based on the life of an African-American

named Britton Johnson. John Wayne never knew he was playing the role of a Black man, which is ironic when you know his very conservative political views,” says Sarrat.

The myth of the Wild West is one of the most powerful in the world, adds Sarrat, which is exactly what he feels will make

this documentary so globally appealing: “The curiosity to discover its hidden truths is a universal curiosity. Then there is the unique destinies of these Black heroes and heroines: Bass Reeves, Jim Beckwourth, Mary Fields... their lives are incredible and express the very essence of the Wild West.”



Secrets Of Playboy

Producer: IPC Television

Distributor: A+E Networks

Broadcaster: AETN

Logline: Exploring the hidden truths behind the fable and philosophy of the Playboy empire through a modern-day lens

This 10 x 60-minute docuseries delves into the complex world of Hugh Hefner's Playboy empire, examining its far-reaching impact on our culture's view of power and sexuality.

Brad Abramson, executive producer on the series, goes so far as to say that the project has "changed the cultural conversation around Playboy and Hugh Hefner."

He explains: "Playboy has long been one of the world's most familiar brands, representing a life of glamour and sophistication - but this

series reveals the dark underbelly of Playboy. In truth, Playboy was a toxic culture that used and discarded countless women over many decades. As the series progresses, we see real evidence of a culture of misogyny and violence, and we'll never look at Hugh Hefner and Playboy the same again."

Through archival footage and exclusive interviews with insiders from all facets of the Playboy world, many sharing their stories for the first time, the series unravels the glamorous mythology created by the brand.

"The most surprising thing we learned is that while Hefner ran Playboy with an iron fist, the corporation around him was built to protect him and cover up the abuses that occurred on his watch. He employed 'clean up' crews to actively silence women who complained about abuse suffered at the hands of

Hefner and his VIP friends," claims Abramson, adding that the docuseries holds clear international appeal. "The Playboy logo is one of the most recognisable logos in the world. Hefner was an international figure, and we expect this series to resonate with viewers all around the world."



Devoured

Producer: Station 10 Media

Distributor: Vice Distribution

Broadcaster: Vice TV

Logline: Hard to believe stories of how food fuels criminal enterprises, both large and small

Blending true crime and culinary exploration, this 6 x 60-minute docuseries delves into real-life stories of how our love of food

fuels criminal enterprises, both large and small.

Along the way, the series also dishes up the origin stories of a

variety of plates and their impact on the culinary landscape.

"We were amazed to discover how human emotions (love, hate, fear, loss) can lead some people to create mouth-watering foods – and others to commit heart-breaking crimes. Sometimes both. Discovering how these two passions drive the need to create or to destroy

was constantly surprising," shares Lee Hoffman, executive producer for Vice TV.

Revealing how the project came about, he explains: "We started with the story about the restaurant, L&B Spumoni Gardens, and its tantalizing convergence of a secret family recipe; organized crime; murder; and pizza.

"All are ingredients for an incredibly gripping tale and led us to explore more stories where crime and food combine in ways that are uniquely compelling."

It's a series of stories that Hoffman feels has definite global appeal: "A love of food and a fascination with crime are fairly universal human traits. And while nothing can bring people of different backgrounds together quicker than sharing a great meal, there is equally powerful shared experience in reflecting on the darkest side of the human experience."



Take the money?

New formats have always had to fight for space against the exploitation of proven IP, so what has prompted broadcasters to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in schemes to create new shows, asks Richard Middleton



Formats are designed to be exploited again and again. This repeatability is baked into the essence of the industry, yet it must also co-exist with the need to come up with new ideas.

It's a fine balance that has always existed, yet the past year or so has seen a flurry of funds and partnerships emerge that are designed to power creativity up a notch. Some have eye-catching numbers next to them: UK pubcaster Channel 4 launched its scheme in late 2020 with a £30m (\$40m) fund; a headline-grabbing \$100m initiative then came from Fox in October last year; followed by a transatlantic alliance – without a number attached – between the BBC and NBCUniversal (NBCU).

Moneybags has been commissioned for a second season on the UK's Channel 4, which launched a \$40m fund

Such initiatives are all looking to fund the creation of new formats in one way or another, but such schemes are not altogether new: broadcasters and production groups have sought to turbocharge format development for years, while country-specific industry schemes have helped to support many new formats making their way to market.

Scale & reasoning

What makes these schemes different is their size and ambitions, suggesting something bigger is afoot. Jin Woo Hwang, president & exec producer at South Korean format specialist SomethingSpecial, tells TBI that the pandemic and its associated effects on

production worldwide led to some companies looking “to explore rather than exploit” on the format front. A desire to compete on new ideas has naturally seen others then making similar moves.

There has also been a rapid evolution on the acquisition side, with numerous streamers going global and looking for cost-effective unscripted ideas that can be replicated. Some execs TBI spoke to for this feature admit that they are surprised that these OTT buyers have not been more forthright in their format and exploitation strategies to date, but the situation is by no means certain to last.

Others, including Media Ranch CEO Sophie Ferron, say the streamers’ strategy is increasingly focused on snapping up paper formats in order to bag global rights from the outset.

“The sheer fact there are so many streamers all looking for subscribers gives a lot of weight to the paper format, because they need those high concept ideas - and they need to own it to roll it out,” she adds.

This evolving landscape might suggest why broadcasters are looking to capitalise and leverage their existing positions as ‘mass-audience’ machines. The potential of getting your show in front of millions via a US or UK broadcaster is the holy grail for most format producers and the networks, of course, know it.

But as Rob Wade, president of alternative entertainment & specials at Fox Entertainment, tells TBI, there has also been a revisiting of the way money is being spent. Broadcasters in many parts of the world, particularly smaller markets, are cash-strapped and looking for more bang for their buck.

The idea of the Fox Alternative Entertainment (FAE)-backed scheme is to leverage this necessity, providing creative producers with funding to create ambitious shows that can launch an entire season in a smaller market, rather than investing in a single pilot in the US that might tell execs little about the show’s potential for success.

In some ways, the BBC and NBCU pact is similar in that it is also looking to make broadcasters’ money go further. Kate Phillips, the BBC’s controller of entertainment, tells TBI that their scheme came about when it emerged NBC and the UK pubcaster were both producing pilots of *This Is My House*. Had there been a more formal arrangement, development costs could potentially have been shared.

“In the scripted world, this has been done an awful lot – broadcasters joining forces on sitcom or drama, and I thought why is it not happening in unscripted. It seemed quite obvious and a way for broadcasters to make shows go further.”

“There’s also a need to go deeper, to find more creative and different people to come into the market

at the moment, because unscripted TV has moved into a more mature stage,” Wade adds. “There was a time when you could take ideas focused on a best singer, or to put a guy with 10 women... now it requires a bit more creativity because viewers are increasingly sophisticated.”

For James Townley, who is on the opposite side of the equation as global head of content development at Banijay, the schemes also make sense. “The ongoing thirst for new content and IP, along with the shortage of talent, is pushing the market to come up with new ways to appeal to creatives, differentiate slates from other players, and in turn bring audiences new programmes to enjoy.”

Townley, however, also notes that his giant group also offers its own funds and initiatives. Banijay’s Creative Fund supports new IP with international potential and it is from this source that ITV’s *Starstruck* emerged from the UK’s Remarkable. *Blow Up* from Endemol Shine Netherlands, and *Shaolin Heroes* from Metronome and for TV2 in Denmark, have also been recipients.

“These funds can also help producers take creative risks early on – for example investment into cutting-edge technology as part of the development process not yet tried and tested on screen. *Your Body Uncovered* for the BBC is a great example of this,” he adds.

Clearly, investment has worked elsewhere previously too. Korean content outfit KOCCA has been pumping money in to support the country’s IP creation for years and the results are now apparent on screens around the world.

“Most of the format funding projects from KOCCA nowadays are designed to support independent production companies,” explains SomethingSpecial’s Jin Woo Hwang. “The objective is to strengthen creativity and provide commercialising opportunities for independent companies.”

Countries including Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, India and Thailand are also focusing on developing local IP, Hwang adds, highlighting Singapore’s Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)’s Made With Singapore scheme as “a good example”.

SomethingSpecial has also been a direct recipient of local funding, landing backing from KOCCA’s Format Lab Fund that has since “given birth to nine wonderful new format ideas”, some of which are now being “aligned” with international partners. “This enables us to proceed into bigger opportunities,” he continues.

Canada’s Media Ranch was also an early proponent of format incubation schemes, with its Horsepower initiative creating IP such as *House Party: Just Dance* (being adapted in the US by Wheelhouse Entertainment) and *Love Van* (in the works via

“There’s a need to go deeper, to find more creative and different people to come into the market – unscripted TV has moved into a more mature stage”

Rob Wade,
Fox Entertainment



Love Van came into being as a result of Media Ranch's Horsepower initiative



WarnerBros. Discovery-owned Renegade Pictures in the UK).

And, again, signalling the growing interest of broadcasters to get involved with such schemes, Canada's Quebecor Content was last year joined by French giant TF1 as a partner on Horsepower. For Media Ranch's Ferron, the broadcasters' involvement is a way for them to play in the market for new ideas while also managing their risk.

Rights & returns

There is, however, a cost to all these schemes. Fox's fund is a commercial enterprise and not a charity, Wade makes clear, and any format FAE invests in – sums of around \$2.5m are available – must have a “route back” to appear on the US network.

Fox's ownership stake in the IP is on a “sliding scale” depending on how much it puts in, but Wade says producers are incentivised and that once FAE's investment is recouped there is the potential for more back-end. “You essentially get financing but also an intravenous direct line into a network and that is kind of our trump card,” he adds.

Conversations are underway with companies in the UK, France, Ireland, Sweden, Australia and Mexico, while the scheme was launched with a show that acted as a signpost of intentions.

Variety competition format *The Big Deal* was produced for Ireland's Virgin Media Television in

partnership with Dublin-based BiggerStage, with FAE owning the format. No news yet on if it's to debut on Fox, however.

Channel 4, meanwhile, is a year ahead with its scheme and recently greenlit a second season of quiz show *Moneybags* from UK producer Youngest Media. Relationship duo *The Love Trap* and *Open House: The Great Sex Experiment* and quiz format *One And Six Zeros* are also in the works.

For Phillips at the BBC, the focus is on “big, gameshow and shiny floor ideas” as well as fact-ent ideas. Just over six months into their pact, numerous shows are in development from producers who are happy to forego US and UK rights in return for investment. It is not a small price to pay, but, as with Fox, the opportunities opened up by having a format that lands in the US is likely to ease producer worries.

That said, Phillips is clear that the scheme is only one way to work with the BBC and that pre-existing development and pilot schemes – that allow the producer to retain the US rights – are available. “It does feel like a win-win though,” she adds. “There's a big pot of money when we combine.”

Wade also admits that “scepticism” in funding schemes does exist, but he urges broadcasters and creatives to explore their potential. “There's always the ‘what if’ – can I have all the pie,” he adds of producers' wishes to retain all rights.

With demand for new IP soaring, it is not just the buyers evaluating risk and reward any more. **TBI**

\$100m

The size of Fox Alternative Entertainment's unscripted format fund, launched last year

WORLD WAR II THROUGH THE WORDS OF THE DESCENDANTS



11 x 52'

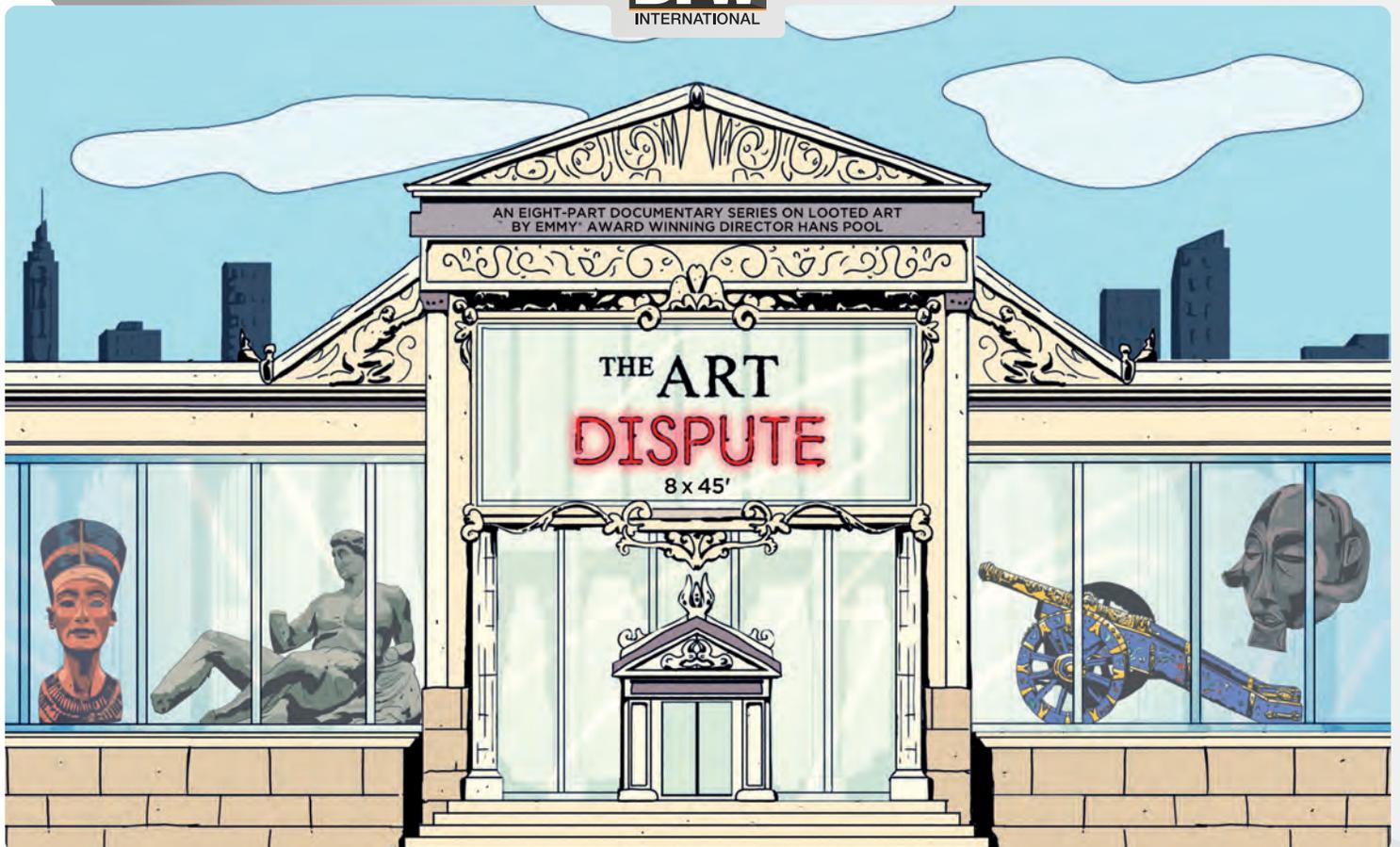
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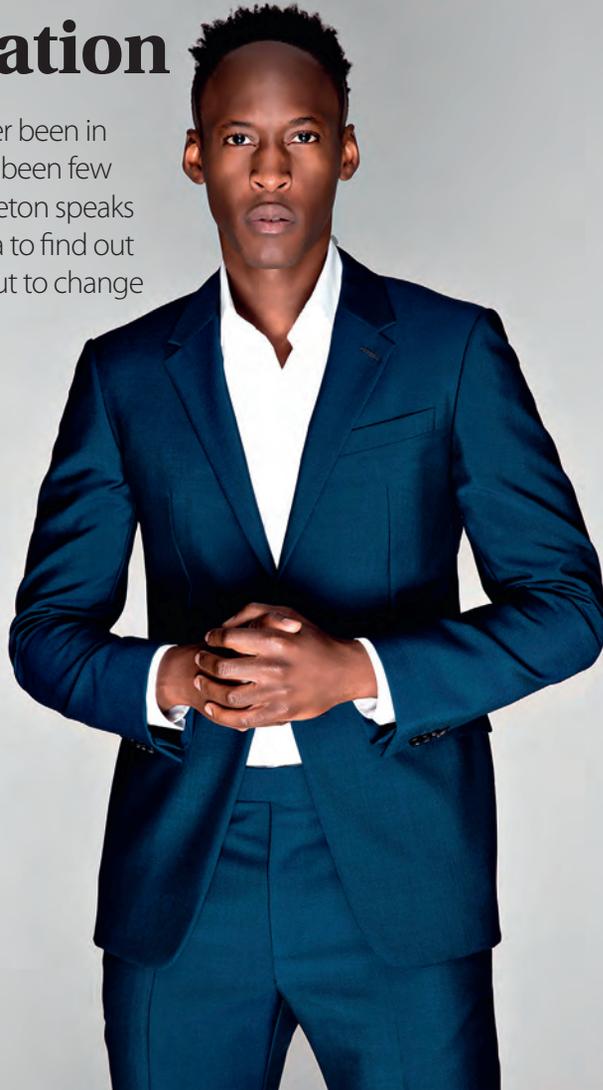


BOOTH R7.B1



Next generation

South Africa's creativity has never been in doubt, but format exports have been few and far between. Richard Middleton speaks to Rebelintown's Jimmy Muteba to find out why the situation could be about to change



The format market is in some ways a fairly cyclical beast, with the wheel of creativity turning slowly as audiences make the arduous march to embrace new ideas.

It can mean the most popular, seemingly evergreen genres get treated and retreated innumerable times and, sometimes, with little sign of evolution.

But every so often, a spanner is thrown in the works and a truly original idea cuts through. A South Korean masked singing show, for example – an idea that suddenly pops and moves the entire business to start focusing on something else.

This has not happened in South Africa yet, but it just might be a new hunting ground for hot ideas. The country's impact on the global format market has been light touch to date: formats have certainly sold in, but the bright sparks of domestic creativity have not tended to make their way out.

Rebelintown CEO Jimmy Muteba says streamers are opening doors for South African format creators

Breaking out

One show that has broken out of its domestic bubble is *The Coolest OG's*. Produced by Johannesburg-based Rebelintown, the format originally aired on South African public broadcaster SABC last year to high praise.

It then went continental, when producers struck a deal that saw the series become available across Africa via regional streamer Showmax, something of a rarity for a show that had already aired on a public broadcaster. Now, it is going global – to be known as *Still Got It!* – after securing distribution via Banijay.

For Jimmy Muteba, CEO of Rebelintown, it underlines the potential that streamers, in particular, are offering to local format creators.

“They are trying to connect audiences with these sorts of shows outside of South Africa and with the

rest of the continent,” Muteba says. “We are talking to streamers and free-to-air broadcasters and they’re all really interested in having these types of formats.”

Still Got It’s premise is simple enough: older people aged between 60 and 80 compete in a series of challenges with the help of their gen z grandchildren to impress a panel of judges. The winners take home a cash prize.

The result, however, allows organic interest across generations and on-screen relationship development. “Older people have amazing stories to tell but often we don’t get to hear them because we are almost moving in different worlds,” Muteba says. “This show changes that.”

Challenges include modelling, songwriting, dancing, gaming and adventure sports activities, providing opportunity for insight and comedy.

Streaming in

The deal with Banijay will see Rebelintown retaining rights to distribute the format in Africa, working in partnership with the group on a non-exclusive basis in North Africa. The distribution and production giant will be exclusively responsible for deals across the rest of the world.

“This is something you don’t see often,” Carlotta Rossi Spencer, head of format acquisitions at Banijay, tells TBI. “Shows on the market involving older generations are normally very different to this... this is about empowering a generation that is not usually empowered.”

It also comes at a time when format buyers are keener than ever to make the next turn of the wheel, investing not just money but time in countries that have largely been untapped to date.

“We’re constantly pitching to streamers and broadcasters,” says Muteba, with Netflix the most active in the region at present. However, Disney+ and HBO Max are both set to launch on the continent this summer and demand is expected to rise.

“And they are just as interested in unscripted as scripted. I know in the past it was hard to have the unscripted conversations with them, but that’s not what we are finding right now, they are very receptive.”

Muteba also highlights that the consumption patterns of younger streaming viewers are different. They are in many ways more open to new ideas, he adds, and the result is a flurry of creativity from local producers.

“This will allow us to focus on innovation, but we are also fusing entertainment with technology. Doing that at the highest level is pretty exciting, as is being



aware of all the changing platforms and how people are consuming this content.”

Africa also offers finished sales potential to formats in their early stages of travel, as evidenced by *The Coolest OG’s*. Muteba points to how Showmax audiences in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria consumed his show, with that popularity replicable across the continent via South Africa’s diaspora.

“This is one of the first unscripted deals where we are seeing a locally created South African, or even African, format being represented and distributed globally,” he adds. “It feels like our moment is finally arriving.” **TBI**

The Coolest OG’s has been a proven hit at the local and continental level and is now going global via Banijay

Formats Hot Picks Our pick of the latest, greatest formats heading to market

Dating Like The Stars

Producer: Talkback
Distributor: Fremantle
Broadcasters: Channel 4
Logline: Singletons try to find their perfect match by recreating famous scenes from Hollywood movies

There is movie magic in the air in this innovative dating format that gives singletons the chance to woo three potential love matches – while also recreating some of the most famous scenes in Hollywood history.

Before picking a prospective partner to date in real life, participants dive into the world of film by acting out love scenes from iconic blockbusters.

“It’s not just a dating show – it’s an experiment to see if on-screen chemistry can translate into real life love for ordinary people in the way it has for some of Hollywood’s biggest stars,” reveals Laura Gibson, creative



Top Pick

director at Fremantle-owned Talkback.

Guided by acting and intimacy coaches, the leading lady or gentleman first meet their potential match in the rehearsal room, where they immerse themselves in the

chosen scene. After filming, they review the takes to decide on who they would like to join them on a real-life first date.

There are plenty of steamy scenes to serve as inspiration, says Gibson, revealing: “The *Fifty Shades Of Grey* spanking

scene was particularly fun – the boy wanted to swap roles.

“Others included the Patrick Swayze/Demi Moore pottery scene from *Ghost* and the raunchy rain scene from *The Notebook* that made Ryan Gosling a worldwide pin up.”

Open House: The Great Sex Experiment

Producer: Firecracker
Distributor: Passion Distribution
Broadcasters: Channel 4
Logline: Social experiment exploring whether relationships can be open and can thrive without monogamy

Societal taboos are on the line in this social experiment format that questions whether relationships can be open and can thrive without monogamy.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery’ is in the Ten Commandments. For thousands of years western society has been built on the foundation that relationships consist of two people. There have been huge changes to the moral code of the society. A hundred years ago,

women didn’t have the vote, 50 years ago homosexuality was illegal and kids out of wedlock was terribly controversial. Now these things are in the mainstream of society. Could the same be said for open sexual relationships in the future?” asks Jes Wilkins, CCO at Firecracker.

The format sees six couples join a project that will help them to decide whether they are ready to allow each other to have sex outside of their

relationships, exploring whether their relationships will be able to handle the pressure and if the reality lives up to the fantasy.

“Relationships are a universal theme. *Open House* asks a purposeful question about

our lives, but it is equally entertaining, mischievous and unique as it is committed to addressing its premise – can opening up our relationships to others make them stronger?,” reveals Wilkins.



Freeze The Fear With Wim Hof

Producer: Hungry Bear Media

Distributor: BBC Studios

Broadcaster: BBC One

Logline: Celebrities on a journey of self-improvement face their demons via extreme cold therapy

Extreme athlete Wim Hof has dedicated his life to teaching the benefits of cold-water therapy and showing others that they can achieve things they thought were impossible – and now he’s taking eight celebrities on a once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

The stars will live together in a tented dwelling in the cold of northern Italy, where they will face a range of chilly trials.

“All the challenges are designed to test the celebrities mind and body to their limits. Whether that’s plunging into ice water, daily cold showers, balancing at the top of an icy waterfall, running with bare feet



in the snow or swimming under a frozen lake,” reveals Hungry Bear Media MD Dan Baldwin.

“The celebrities may be suffering from anxiety, insomnia or they simply want to shake up their life. Ultimately they want to come out of this experience happy, healthier and stronger.”

Sumi Connock, creative director of formats at BBC Studios, adds that the format comes “at a time where we are all wanting to be the best version of ourselves – healthier, happier and stronger.”

She tells TBI: “After an extended period confined to

our homes, the global pandemic has not only encouraged us to look after ourselves, but also to appreciate the great outdoors.

“This does both – filmed in a stunning location but also packed full of tips to help you achieve a stronger sense of self in your everyday life.”

How I Got Here

Producer: Forté Entertainment

Distributor: Boat Rocker Rights

Broadcaster: BYU TV

Logline: Second generation children accompany their parents back to their country of origin, to relive the circumstances that led to their families making the journey to settle in North America

Part travel show, part intimate documentary, this format follows second-gen children as they follow their parents back to their country of origin, to relive the sacrifice, struggle and dramatic circumstances that led to their families coming to North America.

“The series has an amazing, diverse cast of people hungry to explore their culture and their identity. In the first season, *How I Got Here* has travelled all over the world – Eastern Europe, Africa, Central America, South

America. Every journey is truly transformative for both parent and child,” says Natalie Vinet, VP of global sales for factual at Boat Rocker.

Each episode sees the subjects discover what is distinct about their culture by hearing stories of their ancestors and walking in their footsteps, but also meeting relatives, sometimes for the first time, and creating new bonds.

Vinet says that *How I Got Here* offers “a refreshing view into the travel genre that everybody can identify and



connect with as it taps into peoples’ universal desire to delve into their heritage and history in order to help them understand and define themselves.”

She explains: “In many ways the world has become a much smaller place as people have settled in countries very different from their own and wanted to

embrace new ways of doing things, whilst still celebrating where they came from and what makes them who they are.

“What you learn through *How I Got Here* is that, no matter what we look like or where we are from, as humans we are more similar to each other than we are different.”



Re-connecting

As linear viewership among teens and tweens continues to decline, Mark Layton finds out what’s enticing this audience away from the TV set and how ‘traditional’ broadcasters are attempting to engage them

The number of teens and tweens watching broadcast TV has been on the decline for several years now. While the figures vary from country to country, the pivot away from traditional programming blocks to VOD consumption and mobile platforms has been profound.

Taking the UK as an example, research from regulatory body Ofcom reveals that in 2020/21, 92% of 12-15-year-olds watched VOD content, ranging from streamers like BBC iPlayer to platforms such as YouTube, while only 61% engaged with broadcast TV.

Perhaps the clearest indication of why this shift has occurred, however, lies in that the research also found 91% of this age group owned their own smartphone devices, with a resounding 99% using video-sharing platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat.

Today’s teens and tweens prefer to consume content where they are and when they want, rather than sitting down in front of a larger screen for a pre-scheduled period, but that doesn’t mean that they are now out of reach of ‘traditional’ broadcasters.

“We got into the radio business and we got into the television business right at the beginning of those technologies and those platforms, and I think it’s our goal to really follow our audience where they are,” explains Marie McCann, senior director of children’s content at CBC Kids in Canada.

Street Cents has been revived by CBC as daily short-form content on TikTok

Last month, the pubcaster relaunched its popular 1990s/early-2000s financial-literary-for-teens series *Street Cents* in a new format on TikTok. Rather than the previous magazine show iteration, the brand has returned as daily short-form content on the platform.

“The idea behind this reboot is to create a financial literacy movement to connect with the audience. A year from now, two years from now, TikTok might not be the place to reach that audience. We’ll always be looking for the right platform to reach our audience,” reveals McCann, who tells TBI she is invested in taking content to this audience and “not trying to get users over to a platform they don’t use.”

The lure of interactivity

The reach of ByteDance-owned TikTok is certainly not to be underestimated. Research provided by K7 Media found that the platform overtook YouTube in average watch time in the US and UK in 2020.

As of March 2022, TikTok is available in more than 150 countries and has been downloaded over 200 million times in the US alone. Of that US audience, there are around 80 million monthly active users, the largest percentage of which (32.5%) are aged between 10 and 19-years-old, showing clear engagement with the teen and tween demographic.

CBC isn't alone in its use of TikTok, with K7 finding that many broadcasters and streamers have taken to the platform in the past couple of years to repurpose their existing shows as short-form content, including the BBC, HBO, CBS, Netflix and many others.

Snap's Snapchat app, meanwhile, is just as prolific in reaching this teen audience, with the platform used by more than 90% of 13–24-year-olds in the UK as of Q4 2021, according to the company's own internal data. Globally, the number of daily active users grew to 319 million in this period, expanding rapidly to add 54 million of those users in 2021.

Snapchat's Discover area contains numerous ad-supported short-form content channels from major publishers, broadcasters and brands, alongside content created by users' personal friends.

"Discover is basically the world's best TV station and it's one that lives on your phone. It's one that reaches an audience that you can't find anywhere else," says Suzy Cox, Snap's head of programming for EMEA, India & APAC.

"There's literally nowhere else where you're going to find *Cosmo* journalists testing new lipstick, next to Sky Sports doing the goals of the weekend, next to Graham Norton interviewing the *Avengers* cast, next to Channel 4's news coverage, next to Vice interviewing doomsday cultists," she tells TBI. "There's a lot to choose from, which I think Gen-Z really appreciates."

Cox further highlights the convenience of Snapchat and its content offering for younger users – they're already on Snapchat to talk to friends and its features allows them to talk about what they're watching, when they watch it. "We often say, Snapchatters don't watch, they interact," she adds.

Snap has been working with broadcasters for many years now, including recent partnerships with M6 and Canal+ in France, while companies such as Sky have been on the platform "pretty much since the dawn of Discover," says Cox.

Most broadcasters tend to use the Discover platform to show cut-down versions of existing content, while others like the UK's Channel 4 do have some digital originals on the platform, such as *Mashed* and *How Not To Be Racist*.

Snap's curation of Discover further appeals to Gen-Z's desire to be informed around the world around them, without the risk of encountering "fake news," says Cox.

The service also houses Snap originals, including a series based on Cox's own YA novel *The Dead Girls Detective Agency*, while last year saw Snap launch its first Indian original, *Phone Swap India*, with its first UK original, *A Fighting Chance*, coming to the platform soon.



Tradition & transition

While such mobile platforms are clearly booming in popularity among this age group, not everyone is ready to give up on bringing teens back to linear just yet.

UK pubcaster the BBC relaunched its youth-skewing BBC Three as a linear network earlier this year, six years after it was made online-only.

While it is predominantly aimed at 16-34-year-olds, BBC Three controller Fiona Campbell tells TBI that the channel hopes to appeal to younger viewers. "We are looking at pre-watershed shows to either commission or reversion to make them age appropriate. This is so we can build a relationship with a younger audience so they can grow up with BBC Three."

Campbell believes 'traditional' TV is still popular and can bring in large audiences, explaining that the relaunch is "one of the key initiatives" to bring kids to the broadcaster. She cites *Glow Up* and *Young MasterChef* as the kind of commissions with potential to reach this age group and says the channel can work in tandem with VOD service BBC iPlayer to place its content in front of more young viewers.

The exec acknowledges that the mobile platforms are "an effective way to reach young audiences" and explains that BBC Three is using them as a tool, primarily to drive audiences to the channel and to iPlayer "which is our priority."

As for the prospect of permanently losing teens to these platforms as linear viewership continues to dwindle, Campbell comments: "Television has endured and whilst how audiences watch it has changed, it isn't going away anytime soon."

By contrast, CBC's McCann suggests we are witnessing a moment of transition: "Kids want to make content, they want a voice in all this, they don't just want to passively consume it. Once again, a generation has stepped forward and created a whole new genre of content, with new genres within it, and old media is catching up." **TBI**

Phone Swap India launched last year as Snapchat's first Indian original show

"We are looking to build a relationship with a younger audience so they can grow up with BBC Three"

Fiona Campbell,
BBC Three





Robin Robin, Sharkdog and Mighty Little Bheem

Casting a net

Alexi Wheeler, Netflix’s director & head of animated series in EMEA, shares his ambitions to support new talent and local voices, along with which children’s series are currently proving popular for the streamer

How important is Netflix’s children’s content to its overall global success?

It is a great time for animation at Netflix, we’re creating best-in-class animated content, built on a foundation of quality storytelling and diverse viewpoints.

We want to have the favourite programme of each member of the family, so we look to have shows that kids love, shows that families can watch together, and shows that parents want to watch on their own.

We also recognise that families are all different - especially if you think around the world – so in order to cater for their diverse needs, we focus on having a variety of stories, both on the TV and film side.

The great thing about Netflix is you can have *Robin Robin*, *Sharkdog*, *The Mitchells vs. the Machines*, and *Yes Day* all in one place.

What are your ambitions in terms of local kids’ originals?

I’ve spent almost my entire career in the kids and family space across both live action and animation and I don’t think there’s ever been a better time to focus on authentically local stories in kids programming.

While my team is specifically focused on EMEA, we work in close collaboration with our creative partners around the world to bring great stories to Netflix.

Netflix has proven that great stories can come from anywhere and be loved everywhere, whether it’s a show like *Sharkdog* or *Mighty Little Bheem*, so our ambition is to expand upon that in the kids’ space around the world.

Alexi Wheeler leads a team responsible for producing, commissioning and developing Netflix’s original kids and family content from Europe, the Middle East and Africa



What’s on your commissioning wishlist? Are you open to pitches?

We’re always open to talking to creators about their ideas, especially as we grow in EMEA. There are so many talented voices that haven’t had the chance to tell their stories and those are the people who we want to speak to.

What upcoming shows are you looking forward to?

I’m really looking forward to more seasons of *Sharkdog*. It’s one of a handful of kids and family shows to make our global weekly Top 10 list and the combination of a highly visual kids comedy with loveable and relatable characters makes it a great fit for our audiences around the world.

What are you looking for from acquired content?

We really try to focus on what’s best for the project and don’t have a blanket one-size-fits-all approach. Shows come to us at all different stages of production and we have the flexibility to adjust based on the needs of the creators and producers.

Which children’s shows are doing well at the moment for Netflix?

The interesting thing is that some of our recent successful shows are all very different. You have something like *The Cuphead Show!*, which is highly stylised and based on the award-winning video game, but then you also have something like *Gabby’s Dollhouse*, which is entirely different. I would also be remiss not to mention *Cocomelon*, which continues to be beloved by audiences on Netflix around the world. **TBI**

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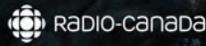
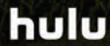
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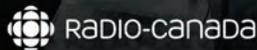
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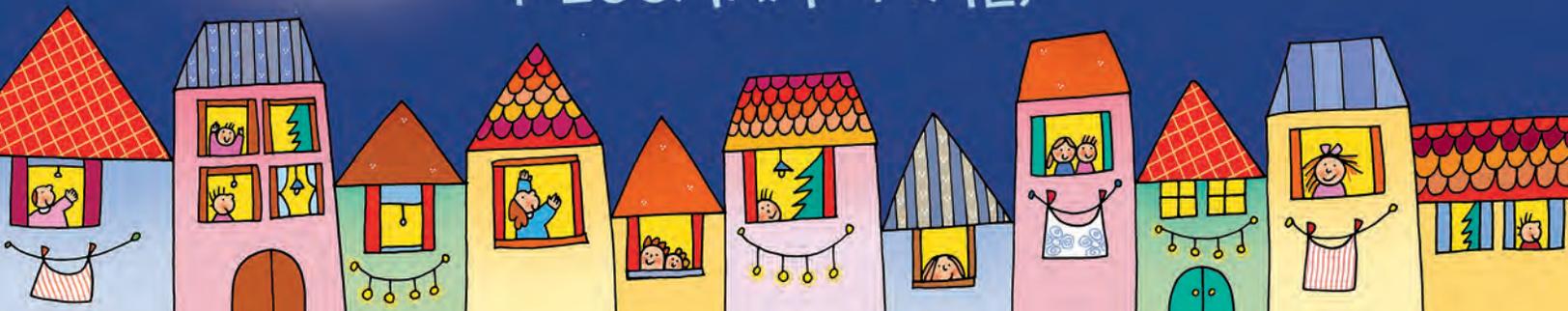
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Feeding the hungry beast

With HBO Max rolling out across Europe, WarnerMedia EMEA kids boss Vanessa Brookman shares the expanding streamer's plans and content demands with Mark Layton



HBO Max has rapidly expanded across Europe in recent weeks, with the WarnerMedia-owned SVOD rolling out in 15 countries in March, while six more launches are planned in the continent for later this year.

The recent confirmation that the service is to merge with new streaming sibling Discovery+ has understandably raised questions about its future, but WarnerMedia's SVP of kids and family, EMEA, Vanessa Brookman, assures TBI her team "is not standing still" and remains as busy as ever commissioning and acquiring programming for these new audiences and existing viewers alike.

Kids and family content plays no small part in making these global launches a success, for HBO Max and other streaming services, and Brookman says its value is now "being understood and appreciated" in a way that it hadn't been before. "Families with kids watch more and churn less and we know that parents think twice about cancelling their subscription if their kids watch the service."

With this in mind, Brookman notes that "it just makes sense to ensure that you have a really strong and compelling kids and family offer," adding that WarnerMedia is "doubling down" on its children's content and "hugely expanding" on its ambitions in this space.

Making a push into pre-school

Streaming services are hungry beasts, of course, and rolling out in so many new countries means keeping HBO Max fed with new, local content. Brookman's team launched a "massive" commissioning round last year with the aim of driving "local relevance."

Receiving about 150 submissions, the team whittled them down to five unscripted developments, including a gameshow and a project

working with local influencers, which are expected to appear on the service in 2023.

"We are really successful in the scripted space, but we wanted to compliment that with unscripted formats that kids can watch with their families," says Brookman, who oversees operational, editorial and creative for kids and family content and channels across EMEA.

Her remit covers not just HBO Max, but Cartoon Network, Boomerang, Boing and Cartoonito, while she also co-leads WarnerMedia's London-based animation label, Hanna-Barbera Studios Europe.

Brookman reveals she is very much open to pitches and while unscripted projects remain high on her content wish list, there is also a big demand for strong pre-school content and shows appealing to girls.

"We have lots of things that we need to do. We're rolling out Cartoonito (WarnerMedia's pre-school brand) across EMEA in 2022, so we haven't ordinarily commissioned in the pre-school space, but we realise that we're kind of missing half of the kid's audience by not doing that. So, we're heavily, emphatically, looking for really strong pre-school content that can be part of our Cartoonito linear networks, but can also appeal to pre-school audiences and their families on HBO Max as well."

She adds: "Then we're also looking for family content; we're looking for gameshows, anything in the unscripted space and live-action comedy. We're so strong in animation, but we really need to complement that with live-action content. That's really important for our EMEA region."

Brookman reveals that the content demand applies to both co-productions and acquisitions, while she is also developing original content out of Hanna-Barbera Studios Europe.

Looney Tunes (opposite) characters remain as popular as ever, while *The Amazing World Of Gumball* (right) is poised to make a return in 2024

“We think that there is a massive opportunity for Hanna-Barbera to bring its unique, quirky, humorous and creative take on pre-school content, both original and then looking at what we can do with our extensive library,” says Brookman.

The studio is working on kids and family content for HBO Max, including a 2024 movie and series revival of the Cartoon Network series *The Amazing World Of Gumball*, following the misadventures of Gumball Watterson and his goldfish best friend, Darwin, which Brookman describes as “the show that should never have gone away”.

The exec adds that she also “can’t wait for the world to see” its upcoming long-form series expanding on *The Heroic Quest Of The Valiant Prince Ivandoe* shorts.

“It’s such a clever show. It’s our first production from Denmark and it’s probably the funniest, broadest humour that we have. It’s one that I think will appeal to kids, but also adults who will get the slightly *Monty Python*-esque humour. It’s tested amazingly well in EMEA, and I think it’s going to be a massive contribution to our global streaming services and our local networks.”

On the acquisition side, Brookman says that HBO Max is looking to buy in girl-focused drama and pre-school content while they ramp up their original production in those spaces.

“Right now, we have really strong acquisitions like *Peppa Pig* and *Hey Duggee*, and we’ve also just announced an acquisition deal for *Interstellar Ella*, a really beautiful pre-school show from Aardman. So, we’re still going to be looking for pre-school acquisitions.”

More specifically, Brookman says that live-action series that appeal to girls are of particular interest: “We know that girls probably age out of animation a little bit early and we want to offer them a live-action alternative. So, we’re looking at those aspirational girl dramas that we think will provide a bridge between our animation and then them going off to watch *Friends* when they’re a little bit older.”

All pre-school shows for the Cartoonito brand, both acquisitions and originals, must however conform to four pillars of “human-centric learning,” highlights Brookman.

“Everything we buy, everything we commission has to support the four pillars, which is creativity, caring, curiosity and courage. From that we’re trying to inspire the kids to use their imaginations and then to treat others with empathy and respect.”

Reinventing iconic brands

As well as new commissions and acquired content, it doesn’t hurt that HBO Max can also call on a treasure trove of iconic kid’s brands, ranging from DC to Warner Bros. and Cartoon Network.

“I think we’re really lucky because we have this incredibly rich heritage,” enthuses Brookman. “One of the joys of the job is watching



creatives take these shows that have lived large in the history and lexicon of kid’s content, but just do it with a different spin for a totally different audience and thereby completely reimagine it for a new generation.”

Among the reinventions coming up this year are Looney Tunes animation *Bugs Bunny Builders* and *Batwheels*, which is WarnerMedia’s first pre-school series based on the DC comic book characters, following superpowered crime-fighting vehicles that defend Gotham City alongside Batman, Robin, and other heroes.

“When you think of it on paper – how to marry Batman with pre-school? But the team in the US have done an amazing job of making it look beautiful and making it really relevant for a pre-school audience.

These brands continue to prove incredibly popular, with the top performing kids and family shows for HBO Max EMEA, across Andorra, Spain and the Nordics since they launched in October 2021, including vintage characters in *Tom And Jerry* and *Looney Tunes Cartoons*, as well as DC’s *Teen Titans Go!* and the aforementioned original run of Cartoon Network’s *The Amazing World Of Gumball*.

Looking ahead, Brookman says that children seem to be responding to immersive, interactive content in shows that they can play along with, while anime has begun to “really drive viewing in EMEA, which wasn’t the case five years ago.”

Investment in anime content has been on the rise among broadcasters and streamers all over the world in the past few years and WarnerMedia is no different.

Brookman reveals: “That’s something that we’re looking to as a studio, our response in that space. We’ve hired Jason DeMarco to really lead up our anime strategy across WarnerMedia and his first show is *The Lord Of The Rings: War Of The Rohirrim*. That’s our first real anime play and then we’re looking to see what we can do with that more broadly across our slate.”

Whatever the future holds for HBO Max following the Warner Bros. Discovery merger, it isn’t going anywhere just yet. WarnerMedia clearly has plenty of irons in the fire and so long as the streamer continues its global march, it’s clear that kids and family content will remain a cornerstone of its offering. **TBI**

“We’re looking for aspirational girl dramas that provide a bridge between our animation and *Friends*”

Vanessa Brookman,
WarnerMedia



A silhouette of the Dubrovnik skyline, featuring several domes and towers, set against a light blue background.

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Opinion Louise Bucknole

Leveraging the power of disability

Putting disability at the centre of a show both onscreen and off brings creativity and freshness, argues Paramount UK's VP of kids programming, Louise Bucknole

Kids producers and broadcasters have a crucial role to play in the TV industry's drive towards DEI (diversity, equity & inclusion). The way we portray children in their formative years, and the messages we convey through content, leaves a lasting mark on their lives. This in turn shapes how society engages in discourse around ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability.

On the whole, the kids industry has made strides in the right direction. While there is always more that can be done, both offscreen and onscreen, Paramount UK's audience-led approach to commissioning has meant fair representation is part of our DNA – going way back to shows like *Kenan And Kel* and *Hey Arnold!*

In 2020, Paramount went a step further with its uncompromising 'no diversity, no commission' policy. This sent out a strong message that is now reflected in the content on both Nickelodeon and Channel 5's Milkshake! block. *The World According To Grandpa*, *Go Green With The Grimwades*, *Mimi's World* and *The Loud House* are shows where DEI is baked in.

It's not just Paramount of course. During Covid-19, the BBC made a bold diversity pledge then followed it up with series like *Black History Heroes* and *Colours*. Over at Disney, there is a new DEI initiative called Reimagine Tomorrow while Cartoon Network Studios has invested in *Cartoon Cartoons*, a new shorts programme focused on showcasing diverse stories. Having discussed DEI many times with impassioned and committed colleagues at ScreenSkills, the Children's Media Conference and BAFTA, it comes as no surprise to me that more than half of kids series are now diverse.

Having said this, industry data tells us that one area of DEI continues to lag behind – and that is disability. In kids, the BBC has probably set the standard, with shows like *Pablo* and *Something Special*. But there's no getting away from the fact there is more work to be done in terms of reflecting disabilities and hiring disabled people.

This is not to say we have been inactive at Paramount UK. Whenever we see a meaningful opportunity to introduce a disabled character into a show we do it. Milkshakes!'s *Meet The Experts* featured a number of disabled contributors including gymnast Harmonie. Nickelodeon UK, meanwhile, has aired *Extraordinary Me* – a series about kids like Hester, a blind skier whose

ambition is to compete in the Paralympics. In *The Casagrandes*, a central character has Down Syndrome.

We're proud of all these shows – however we also recognise its time to go to the next level. That's why Milkshake! has just commissioned *MixMups*, a genuine advance in disability representation. Developed and produced with support from the UK Government funded BFI Young Audiences Content Fund, *MixMups*, is the first stop-motion animated pre-school series to feature disabled leads and to be made by a team with lived experience of disability. Aimed at 3-5 year-olds, it shines a light on different pre-school play styles.

The thing that really sets *MixMups* apart is that the creative team has first-hand experience of disability.

Creator, writer and executive producer Rebecca Atkinson is partially deaf and partially sighted and has made waves with her #ToyLikeMe campaign, which calls for more diversity in children's toys. Other members of the team have lived experience either themselves or through their children. With Mackinnon & Saunders producing, I anticipate a series that will be great fun, enlightening and high quality.

Production has just begun and two lessons have already emerged. The first is that disability can't just be bolted on to an existing story line. It has to be integral and authentic otherwise it doesn't land. The fact that two central characters have disabilities brings a unique and fresh value to the show and uncovers untold stories.

The other is that commissioners need to make a genuine effort to mitigate the barriers disabled people face in pitching and producing content. Rebecca's visual impairment meant that presenting across Zoom was more accessible than travelling to meetings in person.

As commissioners, it's important that we look at the structures of our industry which may keep disabled creatives marginalised for a range of reasons and make flexible adaptations to our practice to address this.

We're not there yet – and writer Jack Thorne was right to hold the industry to account in his Edinburgh TV Festival MacTaggart Lecture last year. I'm convinced the desire for change is gaining momentum. Channel 5, for example, recently signed up to the disability passport. To me that suggests a new level of empathy that we are keen to build on at Paramount UK, with compelling and creative shows like *MixMups*. **TBI**

Louise Bucknole is VP of kids programming at Paramount UK, overseeing Milkshake!, Nickelodeon, Nick Jr, Nick Jr. Too and Nicktoons

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Vegeosaurs

Producer: Cheeky Little

Distributor: Studio 100 Media

Broadcasters: ABC Australia & France Télévisions

Logline: Half food/half-dinosaur friends teach young viewers about playing and sharing through their adventures

Travel to a prehistoric world unlike any other, in this 20 x 5-minute CGI animated series for 4-7-year-olds, populated by part dinosaur/part fruit-and-vegetable animals.

The young tricarrotops Ginger lives in Vegesaur Valley, home to fellow vegesaur,

such as the baby pea-rexes, who embark on standalone adventures featuring relatable themes for upper pre-schoolers like mealtime, sharing, friendship and play.

Revealing the story of how this unique food-and-dino combo was brought to life,

Martin Krieger, CEO at Studio 100 Media tells TBI: “One of the creators, Gary Eck, was in a supermarket a few years ago and saw a young child sitting in a shopping trolley playing with a banana and some broccoli. He was making monster growls and roars, so clearly in the child’s imagination the banana and broccoli were huge creatures locked in battle.

“[Eck] phoned his creative partner Nick O’Sullivan and shortly afterwards the initial concept of *Vegeosaurs* was born.”

“It’s an absurdly silly idea, but we still present it as a credible world for young kids to immerse in, complete with a narrator in the style of a wildlife documentary. It also provides the opportunity to spark kids’ interest in fruit and vegetables, in a unique way, which we hope may promote healthier eating and greater engagement with the natural world,” adds Krieger, who says the short runtime also makes *Vegeosaurs* ideal for “linear and non-linear distribution” or as viral content.

Margot And The Space Robot

Producer: Everybody On Deck

Distributor: Dandeloo

Broadcaster: France Télévisions

Logline: A young girl and her robot pal learn about friendship as they set out to stop an alien invasion

Danger arrives from beyond the stars in this 2D animation, in the form of two tiny, but rather cruel aliens, who land in the town of Aquaville with a nefarious plans to enslave the local population.

The only thing that stands in their way is an observant, but overly emotional, young girl named Margot and her new robot friend Gabriel, who looks just like a human boy.

As the programme's director and writer Nicolas Rendu tells TBI, the two unlikely heroes set out on a journey that teaches them both a lot about friendship and their inner-strength.



“[It] shows us that being a friend is about listening and caring for each other's emotions. In fact, friends help each other to be more human,” he says.

Aimed at 6- to 11-year olds, this half-hour special offers plenty to “enthral children around the world,” adds Rendu.

It also explores themes common to youngsters from all corners of the globe, as they learn to manage their feelings.

“Machiavellian aliens, lousy robots, strong robots, scooter chases, laughter and suspense... and the heart of the story, the question of what makes us

human in the face of today's all-powerful technology.

“And, then there's an overly emotional little girl who discovers that her emotions are in fact her strength – and rescues her parents from the clutches of evil aliens by turning their robot against them...”

Jili & Gulu

Producers: Le-Cool Culture & Zhongchuang Huashi Culture Development

Distributor: The Media Pioneers

Broadcasters: Tencent, Youku

Logline: A group of animal friends learn about the world and impart life skills while on their adventures in a magical woodland

Pay a visit to the Drip Drop Forest in this gentle pre-school comedy series following the adventures of a little lion named Jili, a crocodile called Gulu and their many other animal friends, who live happily together in the woodland realm.

There are two 52 x 7-minute seasons of the show already available, with the series aimed at 0- to 6-year-olds and offering educational elements around science, life skills and friendship.

“In *Jili & Gulu*, wherever there is adventure, there is plenty of fun and laughter in

discovering new things and learning about the world, like when Gulu discovers that you can't grow a cake tree by planting a cake in the ground like a seed,” says Maggie Liang, founder and MD of The Media Pioneers, which also executive produces the series.

She notes: “But going on adventures and trying new things can also be scary for kids as well. The characters in *Jili & Gulu* always help each other to overcome their fears, though they all have very different strengths and difficulties, just like

all kids around the world, there is always a way to include all the friends in a new adventure and play together.”

Sharing some of the friends' many adventures, Liang adds: “They discover a cave filled with glowing flowers where they meet a new friend called Echo, that copies everything they say.

They use the sound of a seashell to help a baby crab find his parents and take him back to the beach. They venture to the top of the twin mountains, and sail down the river in a handmade boat, but the best place for fun in Drip Drop Forest is the rainbow bridge, where all of the friends like to play.”



3HZ

Producers: De Mensen

Distributor: Global Screen

Broadcasters: VRT Ketnet

Logline: Family mystery told across both the past and the present as a bereaved teen discovers he has an unusual window into his mother's youth

A youngster gets an unexpected blast from the past in this live-action family adventure told in two different timelines. In the present day, 13-year-old Felix spends the summer with his best friends at their hangout, a swimming pond in the woods.

There, Felix makes an amazing discovery: his vintage Walkman picks up sounds from 1989. The friends are fascinated by the weird, funny fragments from this long-gone era – until they hear something disturbing.

In 1989, someone called Walter was killed. Felix starts to

investigate and soon learns that someone else was also trying to figure this out in 1989 – his own recently deceased mother.

“The vintage Walkman, which serves as the time travel element in the series, elevates the show to a more sophisticated level,” explains Ulrike Schröder, VP of international acquisitions & co-productions at Global Screen, who says “we strongly believe that kids are capable of handling more complex stories.”

The iconic device also plays an important emotional role in the story, reveals Schröder:

“From the onset it was very important to the creators that the Walkman was more than just a gimmick.

Felix finds out, that with his vintage Walkman he can listen to the past, more specifically to his mother's youth. So the Walkman actually serves as a direct emotional link between

Felix and his mother whilst allowing the series to move between two time lines, which gives us this wonderful nostalgic look on the one hand and the modern world on the other.”

Schröder adds that the series has “huge co-watching potential,” and does not talk down to its younger audience.



Alice's Diary

Producers: Sardinha Em Lata, Alice AIE and Geppetto Film

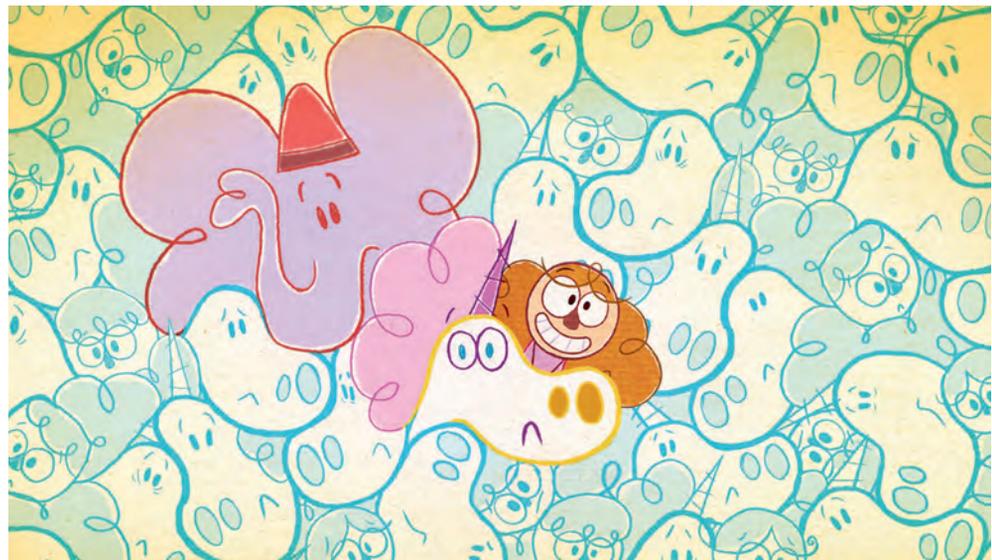
Distributor: Jetpack Distribution

Broadcasters: RTP, RTVE & Disney Junior Lat Am

Logline: A magical insight into the mind of Alice, a quirky, and highly imaginative six-year-old

This 52 x 4-minute animated series delves into the vivid imagination of six-year-old Alice through her drawings, which offer a kids' eye perspective on the world as her pictures come to life to share what she is thinking through striking and comedic visuals.

“Alice lives the life of a six-year-old girl with a big imagination, which compels her to express her feelings, fears and thoughts through art. So, her stories focus on the many things young children think about,” says Jetpack Distribution CEO Dominic Gardiner of the



upper pre-school series, which is currently bound for young audiences in Spain, Portugal and Latin America.

Alice's inquisitiveness nature and unique view of the world shines through during her off-beat and funny conversations with her mum Ana.

“Kids everywhere will relate to Alice's stories, as she openly shares her thoughts, questions and fears. This will encourage young viewers to share their own ideas and opinions with a similarly limitless imagination and a lot of humour,” Gardiner tells TBI.

“The series showcases the value of questioning and helps kids navigate the world, as they picture it. The drawings come to life through a vibrant mix of stop motion and digital 2D animation, compelling for this age group. It's an artful and heartfelt series.”

Alma's Way

Producers: Fred Rogers Production

Distributor: Sinking Ship Entertainment

Broadcasters: PBS Kids

Logline: Bronx-born Puerto Rican six-year-old Alma shares her thoughts and feelings with viewers

Six-year-old Alma Rivera is a proud Bronx-born, Puerto Rican girl living a fast-paced city life, where her closest friend and confidant is the viewer.

Sharing her secrets, feelings and challenges with the audience watching at home, Alma adds colourful commentary to the big and small moments in her life.

When Alma's not sure what to do next, she stops to do one of her signature 'think throughs', in which time freezes and Alma pauses to look back to what's happened or to imagine what



might happen and figure out what she needs to do next.

"Alma's Way will appeal to kids around the world as it reflects the universal experience of problem-solving and creative

thinking skills," says Kate Sanagan, head of sales and distribution at Sinking Ship Entertainment. "Each episode follows Alma as she knows something needs to change but

isn't sure what to do, and we think kids all over can relate to this. Alma's think-through moments in each episode are excellent models for kids to learn self-confidence and resilience."



WHERE THE ENTERTAINMENT IS
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Last Word Dan Snow

How 'Endurance' broke factual waves

“This epic project would allow us to unleash a new way of creating and delivering factual content”

I got the phone call shivering on a platform, waiting for a train. It was a grey British winter day, but I felt like I was under a heat lamp as my caller introduced themselves.

They were from the Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust and they were launching an expedition to find *Endurance*, Shackleton's legendary lost ship, hidden three kilometres below thick ice in the Weddell Sea, Antarctica. Might I be interested?

Trains came and went as I shouted excitedly into my phone. This was not just an opportunity to witness the year's biggest history story; for me, it was way bigger than that. This was the call I had been building towards for a decade. This epic project would allow us to unleash a new way of creating and delivering factual content.

Yes, of course I was keen. But not, as the organisers assumed, as a TV presenter who might persuade a broadcaster to come aboard. No. I could be the broadcaster.

Four years before I had started History Hit, a digital history network for history lovers offering podcasts and social video, a big website and a subscription video on demand channel, History Hit TV. In 2020, my company had joined forces with Little Dot Studios and its own portfolio of digital history, science, natural history and documentary brands on YouTube and social media.

The expedition was History Hit and Little Dot's chance to partner on a story of global interest, to blast it out in real time across all our social channels to allow the world to follow the journey with us as well as provide educational opportunities.

The organisers were not native TikTokers or Instagrammers. But they liked what they heard. They wanted both that social following and, in the event they found the shipwreck, a premium full-length documentary to tell the full story of the expedition, which Little Dot was developing together with the Academy Award-nominated production, education and impact pros at Consequential, veteran shipwreck finders themselves.

It's my fundamental belief that, far from being incompatible, long-form TV and social media coverage of an event can co-exist and contribute to each other's great success. Over the years, I've had a few TV commissioning executives disagree with me about that but, fortunately, the Trust saw the potential upsides. As

a charity, its key aims are education and outreach. We all wanted the premium documentary at the end, but we also wanted the freedom to reach tens of millions along the way. We wanted to stream into classrooms, and get people excited with live broadcasts via satellite. History Hit's vast network of history super fans would love following along even if the expedition didn't eventually find the wreck. Just being on the adventure was enough! We could make videos, podcasts and write articles about the hunt for *Endurance*, whilst sharing valuable insights along the way with the scientists and other experts we had on board.

It came at the right time for History Hit. Our SVOD now had tens of thousands of subscribers allowing us to staff it up with a team that could handle this step change, our podcast network reaches several million a week, our recently launched YouTube channel smashed through 100,000 subscribers ahead of schedule and an early move into TikTok was paying dividends. We were no longer the scrappy startup who might bite off more than it could chew. Little Dot brought gigantic reach but also expertise and one of the best management teams out there, which made the Trust take History Hit seriously.

The rest is history. We went south to the ice. We reached tens of millions of people with the stories of our adventures, then, thrillingly, we found the wreck.

Nat Geo came in early on the exclusive documentary meaning when we announced to the world, we did so in partnership with a global exploration and adventure brand – the perfect broadcast partner to tell this story. In addition to this, the documentary will also be available to all Disney+ subscribers and amplified in Nat Geo's magazine, podcasts and social platforms to reach the largest audience possible. Mission accomplished. **TBI**

Dan Snow is a historian and the co-founder & creative director of History Hit, a media network focused on making the subject more accessible in the digital age



Pictures: Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust and National Geographic

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