

TBI Television Business International

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TBI December 2023/January 2024

Charting a path

There are a few choice words that might be used to describe 2023, but most aren't publishable, so let's just put it down to experience. Even then, for those of you caught up in the 'synergy' savings of US studios or the pain of production hiatuses, the past year may well be one you'd rather forget.

If so, you've come to the right place. The next 12 months look set to define the industry, with producers, creators, commissioners and buyers fighting to survive. But this is also necessitating an ecosystem that is more collaborative, where partnerships will dominate. It is fitting, then, that January brings with it not one but two Miami-based markets, where building relationships across continents and languages is the name of the game.

Check out how former HBO chief Chris Albrecht and Jorge Granier are looking to do just that with their new venture Rubicon Global Media (page six), then explore why true crime is taking Spain by storm (page 10) and how Spanish scripted models are welcoming international partners (page 20). There's also a deep dive on the increasingly global phenomenon of Turkish drama, Hot Picks and columns from industry insiders, and the message is clear: 2024 will be better...



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Scripted Anthony Kimble

Co-pro renaissance in the ‘Age of Downturn’

TBI’s resident scripted expert Anthony Kimble on why Hollywood could finally be ready to navigate collaborative storytelling

After Hollywood’s ‘annus horribilis’ in 2023, the post-strike entertainment hellscape is emerging, transformed and daunting.

The aftermath reflects not just relief and celebration, but a sense of wartime aftershock, with the industry charting a course into a changed world. In this new era, defined by cost-cutting, reduced budgets, and heightened caution, a clarion call rings out in LA – collaboration and co-productions. Everyone here wants to save money and that means not having to shoulder the full financial responsibility for ambitious big-budget stories.

Collaboration sounds simple in principle, however, behind the scenes, the magic of co-production financing demands a delicate balance. Having engaged in drama co-productions since the early 2000s, I’ve witnessed the full spectrum of experiences – from magical partnerships to disastrous multi-partner affairs.

The mid-2010s were littered with forgettable Euro-puddings like *Crossing Lines* and *The Team*, which more than illustrate the pitfalls of misaligned co-productions. On the other hand, successes like Hans Rosenfeld’s Swedish/Danish noir masterpiece *The Bridge* showcase the potential of creative collaborations that organically just work. *The Swarm* (ZDF, RAI, Hulu Japan, France Télévisions and Viaplay) is a recent example of an ambitious multi-partner deal that also succeeded on screen.

The necessity of cost-sharing and the newfound openness of the US to foreign language content is going to present exciting opportunities for us all stateside. As local commissions contract and budgets shrink in 2024, the prospect of more international co-pros on US screens is now inevitable.

But how do you go about making these work?

There are so many moving parts to co-productions and numerous things to consider, but I believe if you get the creative, communication and cash all sorted, the rest should follow.

Creative: Choose great stories that will resonate globally and then fully collaborate on story development, involving creative input from all co-

production partners. Create a diverse and inclusive writers’ room that reflects the cultural perspectives of all involved parties and maintains authenticity.

Communication: Establish clear lines of communication and ensure transparency in all aspects of the co-production. Make sure legal agreements outline roles, responsibilities and revenue sharing among the partners – and stick to them. Making TV by committee is painful enough!

Cash: Develop a realistic budget, one that considers the financial capabilities of all co-production partners. Share resources (access to talent, tech, locations etc) and leverage partner strengths (eg. access to local tax incentives) to make sure the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Don’t neglect the development of a strategic distribution plan that considers the target audiences and markets for the co-production. Remember the more parties involved at the outset means fewer international sales for any distribution partner later and as a result, a lower distribution advance.

Particularly for the US, you should also find out which series have been successful for different studios, streamers or broadcasters and why, and what type of stories press the buttons of key execs. There’s nothing more frustrating for execs to receive pitches for shows that are so far removed from their sweet spots – it just comes across as lazy and desperate and they are less likely to take other pitches seriously moving forward.

Getting one major partner on board at the outset is an important first step too, as it will shore up a project’s viability and vision to US execs. And chasing that creative vision, not just the money, has to be the overriding message that I leave you with. We’ve all cringed when watching shows where an actor from a contributing partner territory turns up in a token and usually unbelievable way... or where the cast decamps to a country for a random scene just to keep the moneymen happy. We all need to trust in the creative and find like-minded partners so as not to dilute those brilliant stories that excite us and that we are passionate about sharing with audiences worldwide. **TBI**

Anthony Kimble is co-CEO and founder of Arrested Industries, overseeing its scripted operations from LA

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Formats Siobhan Crawford

Hello from the other side, I must've called a thousand times...

TBI's resident format expert Siobhan Crawford delves into deals with the US and European opportunity

Adele won't mind I borrowed this, the US loves a Brit. But do they love a European? The US. It's the pinnacle of our industry. The great US commission, the great US format, the great US version, the great US contingent at MIPCOM. But have the great been great to us in Europe? Do they even understand us? Do they know what we have to offer and how to access it? And if so, can the US and European styles find common ground?

Europe is an exceptional thing: our doors are open, hearts on our sleeves, content circulating freely, with strong relationships. We are connected and that is reflected in how we work together, with deals fairly standardised and applicable across multiple territories. We access the top commissioners instantly with no barriers. Distributor or producer, there is no difference. Remember, this is Europe, the UK is a different beast. But across the ocean it is completely different and while we revere the US market, it is not easy to navigate.

Open your doors

Yes, we can reach Netflix, Fox, NBC, ABC, CBS – but can we get through the door and be taken seriously? US networks are hidden behind layers and personnel shifts are a constant struggle. This navigation is one of the things hindering most Europeans in the mission to export. There is no way the European market will ever be able to familiarise ourselves with the depth of the production sector in the US, it is just too big. Enter the agents. These are an oddity to Europe but there's no surprise that we use religious phrases like 'agnostic' - we need to pray to the alters of WME, CAA, APA, UTA that come MIPCOM they will connect us to as many clients as possible! The heritage of US television means there are catalogues no one will ever find but we are all looking!

And then there is the language. Pick-ups. MAGR. Shopping agreements. Life locks. Packaging. What the hell? A US contract can be a beautiful thing but it takes time to get there. You may even read *The Business Of Television* by Ken Basin to get there. No shame folks!

Take these examples.

Europe: option fee 50% recoupable; license fee with

the higher of 5-6% of budget or MG; four exclusions only; 33% ancillary share to licensor, at worst case; flexible holdbacks; creative control; production consultancy per day rate; further series option with uplifts; and, ultimately, reversion.

US: shopping agreement/option with no fee; development window (with or without penalty); pilot with or without fee; series pick-up; 3-5% of budget with 13-25% exclusions to be taken from gross; no MGs but perhaps ceilings; EP if you are lucky or consultancy debates; 12.5-20% MAGR; format participation or complete buy-out; holdbacks; and tape rights in perpetuity.

There may be parallels here but the shapes of these deals are by no means the same. And the key to this is who you work with. The BA from the US side can make this process heaven or hell, so get praying.

With love from Europe

Europe is cheaper, so perhaps we should be the land of opportunity? We are working on primetime ranges of €90k (\$97k) up to €350k in Germany for a 120-minute monster show, or you can have hub productions in Europe for big brand formats for €60k an episode, versus the US network's \$950k-\$1.5m. Fox get it – produce outside the US, test projects outside by buying slots and still save coin. Another positive to Europe that some of you are looking to capitalise on - IP retention! Producers can retain 50-70% of their unscripted format IP (if they don't sell to streamers and even then the difference between approaching the acquisitions team versus the originals team can be the difference between 50% and 0%) while also expecting a meaningful amount of backend revenue on tape. We have tax incentives in multiple countries and while many of the networks probably don't know it, we have some of the most hard working distributors in the world, meaning you also have a competitive environment to choose partners (because yes, in European deals you get to choose).

So, if you want to be part of the European love-in, we are waiting for you to join us. But don't use boats, we don't love those in Europe. **TBI**

Siobhan Crawford is co-founder of Glow Media and has worked in the format business for almost two decades at firms including DRG, Zodiak, Banijay and Primitives



Diversity Deborah Williams

How we perceive diversity

“Everybody is committed to anti-racism without being open to the notion that you can also hold ideas and ideals that are just not right”

This month, CDN is publishing a report on the power of perception in UK television – analysing how the diversity of on-screen contributors is perceived by those commissioning and producing content and how it might be perceived more widely by audiences. The report compares and contrasts this perceived information with the hard data provided by individuals who complete the Diamond form.

Our conversations about the perceived characteristics have led us towards a feeling that ‘if I see it then it’s real’, but there is very limited conversation about the quality of what is being “seen” in the way of representation.

That word ‘quality’ is important because it’s used as a reason for diversity to not be at the top of agendas or conversations. How many times have we heard that in particular about black people and black stories not being “good enough” to appear on screen.

Since 2020, I’ve witnessed large corporate organisations put black boxes and white words on their social media spaces and commit millions of pounds and dollars to the idea that they are going to be anti-racist.

Everybody is committed to anti-racism without being open to the notion that you can also hold ideas and ideals that are just not right. It’s taken me seven years to be recognised as a leading black player within the industry, despite the role I hold, and I have sometimes struggled in wondering why and whether it’s simply because I’m not the right type of black person, perhaps because I’m also disabled, a woman, and from a poor background.

Yet when it comes to skin colour on screen, it seems that shade alone is enough to quench the thirst for diversity.

Whether or not we like it, there is a long-held perception of what being black should mean in UK television and when people do not see what they expect, they somehow believe it’s not real, authentic, or genuine. But what about the truth? And how does

our industry figure out a way to deal with what’s real versus perceived truth?

Our report delves into these questions. We ask about how and why actual data provided by contributors themselves is sometimes seen as unreliable when compared to perceived data gathered by someone else. We want to know more about the impact of not asking more nuanced questions about what we see on our screens. Does that impact who we ask to make what we see?

Currently, the perceived data we have is gathered through a process in which a member of the production team watches a finished programme and records their determination about the diversity characteristics of those on screen. Should we be aiming to build a more accurate and reliable way of collecting and reporting who we think we see in our screens?

I for one feel that effectively guessing people’s characteristics should no longer be an acceptable way of thinking about diversity. We should not leave it to the last moment and to the last person who is rushing to get the last bit of paperwork done.

We shouldn’t ignore the fact that every single one of us has amassed a lifetime of subjectivity and prejudice from the circumstances of our birth onwards, which knowingly or unknowingly plays an enormous part in how we view others around us. Our report offers some thoughts about how we take this whole area forward.

As I head over to New Orleans for Realscreen this month, I’m intrigued to catch up with the latest trends in the factual and documentary space, and in particular the narratives of reality TV are changing in terms of who is most seen and what stories get told.

I hope you’ll take the time to read our report when it is published, which should help us get a better global understanding of what we see and how we see it and contribute towards greater diversity and inclusion in our industry rather than more flatlining and denial. **TBI**

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

Bridging the Rubicon



Chris Albrecht and Jorge Granier teamed last year to launch Rubicon Global Media, a new venture focused on uniting Latin American & Spanish culture with Hollywood talent. Mark Layton talks strategy and financing with the TV veterans

While the popular idiom says crossing the Rubicon refers to a point of no return, what Chris Albrecht and Jorge Granier, co-founders of the namesake Rubicon Global Media, aim to achieve is quite the opposite. They instead plan to build a bridge from the Americas, to Europe, and back.

The nascent production company aims to connect global talent with Latin American and Spanish culture, and conversely, Latin American talent to European and US projects, with a multi-lingual approach to their productions.

James Costos (top, left) reunited with former boss Chris Albrecht (middle) to help finance projects from Rubicon, his new venture with Jorge Granier (right)

“We’re not necessarily Spanish-language, but we are looking into Latin America and Spain to find ideas and to find intellectual property that has been successful and might have been overlooked,” Granier tells TBI, who says that Rubicon aims to “elevate” such properties to a worldwide stage and “be a bridge between Hollywood A-list talent and these wonderful ideas from Latin America”.

Veteran Venezuelan exec Granier is the founder and former CEO of Hispanic-focused AVOD firm Pongalo and served as exec producer on The CW series *Jane The Virgin*, an example of the potential when Lat

Am meets US. He says his current IP search covers everything from books to music catalogues, adding that “we have a few libraries of content that we’re looking at – that would be television and film, kind of like where *Jane The Virgin* came from.”

His American business partner, Albrecht, meanwhile, needs little introduction – he is considered one of the architects of the ‘golden age of television’, overseeing hits such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Sex And The City* and *Deadwood* during his time as chairman & CEO at HBO.

He also served as chief of US firm Starz and, more recently, as president of Legendary Television, which he exited following allegations in last year’s book *It’s Not TV: The Spectacular Rise, Revolution, And Future Of HBO*, about his time at the cablenet, which he denies.

Finding talent & mining libraries

Launching in August 2023, Rubicon came straight out of the gate with a strategic partnership in place with Madrid-based Secuoya Studios. Part of Spanish producer and distributor Secuoya Content Group, the firm is led by former HBO exec James Costos, with the pact reuniting him with his one-time boss.

As part of the multi-project deal, Madrid-based Secuoya Studios will provide development funding and deficit financing for Rubicon series and films.

Later that same month, Rubicon teamed with BTF Media, the Mexican production company behind *Maradona: Blessed Dream* for Prime Video, *Papas Por Encargo* for Disney+ and *La Muchacha Que Limpia* for HBO Max.

BTF Media, led by Mexican entrepreneurs and producers Francisco E Cordero and Ricardo Coeto, will also provide development funding for some of Rubicon’s upcoming projects.

Figures have not been disclosed for either partnership, but Spain and Mexico are, unsurprisingly, key markets for Albrecht and Granier, who tell TBI that they are now on the hunt for similar pacts across Latin America.

“We’re looking for places that are interesting and provide incentives for us to go there and build projects there, and hopefully bring world class talent to those destinations,” says Granier.

Rubicon has also partnered with Curtis ‘50 Cent’ Jackson, who worked with Albrecht on the *Power* franchise at Starz, to develop and co-produce *Prey Before You Eat* (working title), a Spanish and English-language crime drama, and also struck a deal with singer Eladio Carrión to develop a new multilingual comedic series based on his own life.

“There are two aspects to our business model. One

is to do new content; that’s the stuff that’s coming to us off the announcements that we’ve had our deals with Secouya and with BTF Media,” Albrecht tells TBI.

“The other is, we’re raising money to go out and acquire IP libraries, both in the music and the audio-visual space, because they provide not just cashflow for other operations, but an opportunity for us to be able to attract talent and to be able to mine those libraries for new programmes, either new versions or formats or something.”

Path to production

Albrecht says Rubicon will be “thoughtful” in its project choices because “we want to make sure that we have a path to getting something made” rather than wasting time and money in development on productions that ultimately do not see the light of day.

Eladio Carrión is working with the firm on a comedic show based on his own life



The financing deals with Secuoya and BTF “offset the risk of development – something that a lot of production companies don’t have the opportunity to do,” says Albrecht.

He explains that “while going to one of the big streamers is certainly something we’re going to have to do above a certain budget,” Rubicon is looking to be creative in how it funds projects for the moment, such as through shrewd multinational and multilingual co-productions.

“[For example], *Drops Of God*, which we did for Apple when I was at Legendary; we sold it in France (to France Télévisions), because it was set in the world of wine in France, and in Japan (to Hulu Japan), because it was [based on] a Japanese manga.

“With tax credits and Legendary providing a deficit, we were able to make the show and then we sold it to the rest of the world (on Apple TV+). That’s a show that cost a fraction of what *Monarch: Legacy Of Monsters*, the other show we did for Apple, cost.”

“We think that the opportunity in television is not just to work with different talent, but also to find different ways of funding content.

“When we partner with companies like Secuoya and BTF, I think we have a better chance of securing a local sale – I always like to call them anchor tenants in the financing model.”

Reputation also comes with its benefits, adds Albrecht, who says: “We’re known to be good producers, known to be able to navigate the world of the tax incentives and have the relationships there.

“We’re trying to build a global media company, albeit a small independent, not a large conglomerate, and we want to be partner friendly. We think we learn a lot from working with companies that are based in different countries, with different cultures and experiences and access to different talent.

“We think that if we can develop a reputation for talent and that if we have a really high percentage of projects that we get involved with and projects that get made, then that’s going to be a really good attribute for our company,” says Albrecht.

Spanish language successes

Albrecht and Granier see growing opportunities for shows from the Latin American and Spanish worlds, pointing to major Spanish-language successes in recent years that range from hit drug drama *Narcos* to *Money Heist* (aka *La Casa De Papel*), which travelled globally on Netflix.

As Granier puts it, an “evolving audience” has become increasingly comfortable with shows from other parts of the world and “have opened their



Rubicon is developing a series with Curtis '50 Cent' Jackson, who worked with Chris Albrecht on *Power*

appetite to this type of content.”

The veteran exec adds: “I think we can be very successful, not only in the US and Latin America, where we’re making and building these shows, but around the world.”

Granier also points to estimates that the global Spanish speaking audience is around 600 million, highlighting that if the US Hispanic audience was a standalone economy, “it would be the fifth largest economy in the world.”

“So obviously, that’s a big opportunity,” says Albrecht. “There’s an audience; there’s a huge pool of talent; there are certainly a lot of other people already working in this space, but we think we have a different approach.

“We both have a lot of experience, we think our skill sets complement each other and with our business model, that’s going to make us a unique and hopefully desirable place for a lot of people to come work.” **TBI**



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More than murders

Spanish true crime shows are growing in number and attracting international attention, writes Irene Jiménez, while synergies with scripted crime shows are also now proving increasingly attractive for commissioners of all types

From established public broadcasters to the most recently launched streamer, buyers in Spain have been seduced by true crime. Whether twisted cases of murder, corruption or sexual abuse, all operators want their piece of success in this genre.

RTVE, Spain's national public broadcaster, has made true crime one of the differentiating points of its on-demand platform, RTVE Play. "On linear channels we do not offer this genre and that is why we decided to bet on it," says Alberto Fernández, director of RTVE Play. "True crime is a way of talking about Spanish society at certain moments in history, it is a good genre to explain ourselves."

Among original productions that the service offers are: *The Murderer Of The Deck* (Goroka), about a serial killer from 2003; *The Theft Of The Codex* (Cuarzo Producciones (Banijay Iberia)), about the theft of the Calixtino Codex from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in 2011; *Malay: Secret Operation* (Atlantia Media), about the largest case of political and urban corruption in Spain; and *Pact Of Silence* (in-house production), a miniseries about the mysterious disappearance of a thief, who carried out petty thefts in Madrid in the 1980s after being arrested. Previously, the service has also produced *Lucía En La Telaraña* (El Cañonazo, The Facto), about the unsolved murder of a woman in 2008, and *Edelweiss* (100 Bullets (The Mediapro Studio)), the story of a sect that operated between 1971 and 1984 in Spain.

"I think that the concept of true crime in Spain is more lax and broader compared to the American one," adds Fernández, who says that part of the reason could be that there is "a certain saturation of the genre in its most classic conceptions".

Even so, RTVE Play will have two new true crimes about murders in 2024, one of them in co-production

with Valencia's public broadcaster. "True crime can be something very local and, therefore, it doesn't always travel. A crime has a lot to do with the society in which it happens, with the collective memory of the country, and that is why its interest at an international level is sometimes limited. In the documentary field, we do have proposals on social issues to work with other countries, but not on true crime," says Fernández.

This vision is opposite to the experience of Galician company Ficción Producciones, which entered the genre following the fiction series *Operación Marea Negra*, an Amazon exclusive in which several regional public TV stations in Spain also participate. The story, based on the true events of the first homemade narco-submarine that reached European shores, is distributed internationally by Entertainment One.

"For example, Roku first acquired the drama and then the documentary for its premiere in the US and Mexico. We thought that both *Operación Marea Negra* and *A Historia De Crímenes* (A History Of Crimes), the second true crime production we have tackled, would only have local distribution, but we have seen that there is appetite outside of Spain," says Mamen Casal, production and sales coordinator at Ficción Producciones. Specifically, *A Crime Story*, another Amazon exclusive with two seasons, has sparked the interest of international buyers as a format.

"We have avoided recreations, so each episode deals with several cases, with testimonies from the victims and contributions from a team of experts who remain in every episode," he emphasises.

The greatest exponent of true crime in Spain is the journalist Carles Porta and his series *Crims* premiered on the Catalan public television TV3 in 2020, with three seasons already produced.

The show is available nationally through Movistar Plus+ and Netflix.

"What surprises our customers is that *Crims* has impeccable quality, both visually and narratively," says Beatrice Nouh, sales director at Onza Distribution,

Light in the Darkness, from Carles Porta, is described as "an evolution" of his acclaimed series *Crims*



which is in charge of international sales. *Crims* has been acquired by ZDF in Germany and by Netflix for Latin America, as well as reaching China. Porta's prestige has not stopped growing and at the end of 2023 he presented *Light In The Darkness*, an original Movistar Plus+ production, defined by himself as "the evolution of *Crims*."

"We have a bigger budget and we are betting on a more cinematic narrative. For me, true crime starts from journalism, with powerful stories that help us understand things about society, far from just the morbid aspects. I'm very satisfied with *Light In The Darkness* because the result is very powerful," says Porta. The journalist is evaluating proposals from European and Latin American countries to make the international leap, "but what we do requires time and calmness, it cannot be done quickly."

Another Spanish company that has delved into true crime is You First Originals. In 2022, the production company released *11 Tiros FC* in co-production with Beta Entertainment Spain, about murders, rapes, suicides, fights, kidnappings and crimes of all kinds that have taken place in the world of football. The eight-episode series was acquired by HBO Max for its premiere in Europe and Latin America, and has also reached the Middle East through Shahid, the MBC Group streamer.

"We are working on other true crime shows focused on areas such as music," says Javier Martínez, head of original production for You First. The company is also developing other formats in which artificial intelligence plays a key role in investigations.

2023 also marked the first foray into true crime for Atresplayer,

The Murderer Of The Deck is among the original true crime shows on RTVE Play

Atresmedia's SVOD platform, and the free-to-air TV channel Cuatro, from Mediaset España.

The former's *Don't Tell Anyone* revolves around the murder of a family near Madrid by a young Brazilian who was narrating the events to a friend on WhatsApp. For its part, Cuatro has premiered the weekly primetime program *Code 10* (Producciones Mandarina), the only free-to-air offering in the genre currently in Spain on a national level.

The fiction industry is also benefiting from this explosion of true crime. In 2023, Netflix released *The Body On Fire* (Arcadia Motion Pictures), a fictional series based on the fascinating "case of the urban guard", one of the most notable episodes of *Crims*. The same platform will launch *The Asunta Case* in 2024, a fictional miniseries about the murder of a teenager by her adoptive parents in 2013 in Galicia. Bambú Producciones already explored the case in one of the first true crime series on Spanish television, *The Asunta Case: Operación Nenúfar*, which premiered on Antena 3 in 2017, but with little audience data. Perhaps at that time the genre was not mature enough among the Spanish public. Another example of synergy between true crime and scripted is *El Marqués*, a new fiction series from Mediaset España based on the murder of five people in a small town in Seville in 1975. The case will also have its own true crime series, *Los Galindos: All The Truth*, underlining the growing influence of this fast-growing genre. **TBI**

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Hot Picks

From crime, both scripted and unscripted, to futuristic animated adventure, here's a look at some of the best new shows heading to market



Top Pick

After The Flood

When the town of Waterside is hit with the largest flood in its history, the community pulls together to keep everyone safe. However, three people die – one, an unidentified man, is found murdered in a lift in the basement of an apartment block.

Police assume he became trapped as the waters rose but when the autopsy reveals he died several days earlier, PC Jo Marshall goes to great lengths to uncover the truth. How did he get in the lift, who put him there, and why does no one know who he is?

“Jo’s a good cop who breaks the rules for the right reasons – the problem is that

breaking these rules will come at a great cost if she’s ever exposed. So reluctantly, she has to keep her actions contained throughout the series, even though doing so becomes increasingly more difficult,” says Will McDonagh, script executive at Quay Street.

The 6 x 60-minute series is billed as a climate change mystery thriller, which delves into the green-washing deceptions of developers and local politicians.

McDonagh says that Quay Street wanted to tell a story that deals with climate change head on, but in an entertaining way.

“Our fantastic writer, Mick Ford, struck on this idea to put it at the centre of a murder

mystery. We knew we’d be able to deliver a powerful message if we set the story within the heart of a close-knit community, one actively battling climate change, but also dealing with a propulsive thriller mystery.”

McDonagh adds that Quay Street “couldn’t be prouder” of the show’s ambitious opening scenes depicting a flash flood and featuring a complicated stunt sequence.

“Although we knew there would be some CGI work involved, director Azhur Saleem wanted to achieve as much of this practically – to put the audience literally into the water with our characters. This involved building a street set, which we were able to completely fill with water, and splitting the opening sequence between various locations, which our post-production team masterfully stitched together.

“Our cast was exceptional and committed to the stunt work wholeheartedly, and our crew worked tirelessly to bring the whole vision to life.”

Producer: Quay Street Productions

Distributor: ITV Studios

Broadcaster: ITV & ITVX (UK) & BritBox International (US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland)

Logline: A devastating flash flood unearths the body of a murdered man, and a dedicated police officer sets out to find out who killed him and why – no matter the cost

The Negotiators International

This 4 x 48-minute series delves into one of the world's most high-pressure professions, requiring incredible skills and bravery in the face of often-lethal danger – hostage negotiation.

With exclusive access, the series follows top-level international negotiators in some of the world's most dangerous hostage situations, from terrorist group Boko Haram to an American cop gone rogue, to a ruthless Mexican drug cartel and a Manila mall hostage crisis.

“Hostage negotiation is one of the world's most dangerous and highly-skilled jobs and yet so little is known about it. I think audiences will love learning the secrets of this art,” says Julian Chou-Lambert, acquisitions & partnerships manager at TVF International.

He adds that the show will have international appeal because the hostage situations featured take place in different parts of the world.

“Audiences will be on the edge of their seats, as vivid dramatic reconstructions transport them into negotiation rooms, where one wrong move can prove deadly,” he says.

Producer: Peddling Pictures

Distributor: TVF International

Broadcaster: CNA (Singapore)

Logline: A deep dive into the art of hostage negotiation, one of the world's toughest and most dangerous jobs

Negotiators participating in the series include former FBI chief negotiator, Gary Noesner, whose negotiation instruction manuals are currently used by government agencies all around the world.

“This series reveals that the art of listening is absolutely critical to a successful hostage negotiation, as it allows the negotiator to understand the hostage taker's state of mind, demands and any weaknesses,” adds Chou-Lambert.

“Also, several of the expert negotiators featured are women, which shouldn't be surprising, but is something that isn't always reflected across the genre of true crime programming,” he says, with the show focusing “on brilliant women in law enforcement, alongside female victims of crime.”



Dead In The Water

In July 1978, the bodies of childhood sweethearts Chris Farmer and Peta Frampton were found floating off the coast of Guatemala. Decades later, long after the trail for their killer has gone cold, Chris's sister, Penny, now a journalist, makes a shocking breakthrough in the case.

“The documentary covers the families’ agonising search for Chris and Peta, waiting in hope for any sign or contact,” reveals Keeley Van Dyke, executive producer at Raw TV. Three months after their disappearance, authorities tracked down boat skipper Duane Boston and interviewed him. He stated that Farmer and Frampton disembarked his boat in Guatemala, claiming that they were into drugs. Two bodies then washed up off the coast and were identified as Farmer and Frampton: they had been tortured, hogtied and weighed down with engine parts.

“The families suspected the boat skipper had something to do with their deaths, but when Boston went on the run, police failed to investigate him further and with no concrete evidence, the case was allowed to go cold,” Van Dyke says.

Almost four decades later, Penny took over her family’s pursuit for the truth, searching for Duane

Producer: Raw TV

Distributor: All3Media International

Broadcaster: Amazon Prime Video (UK, Ireland, Canada, the Netherlands, the Nordics, Australia, New Zealand)

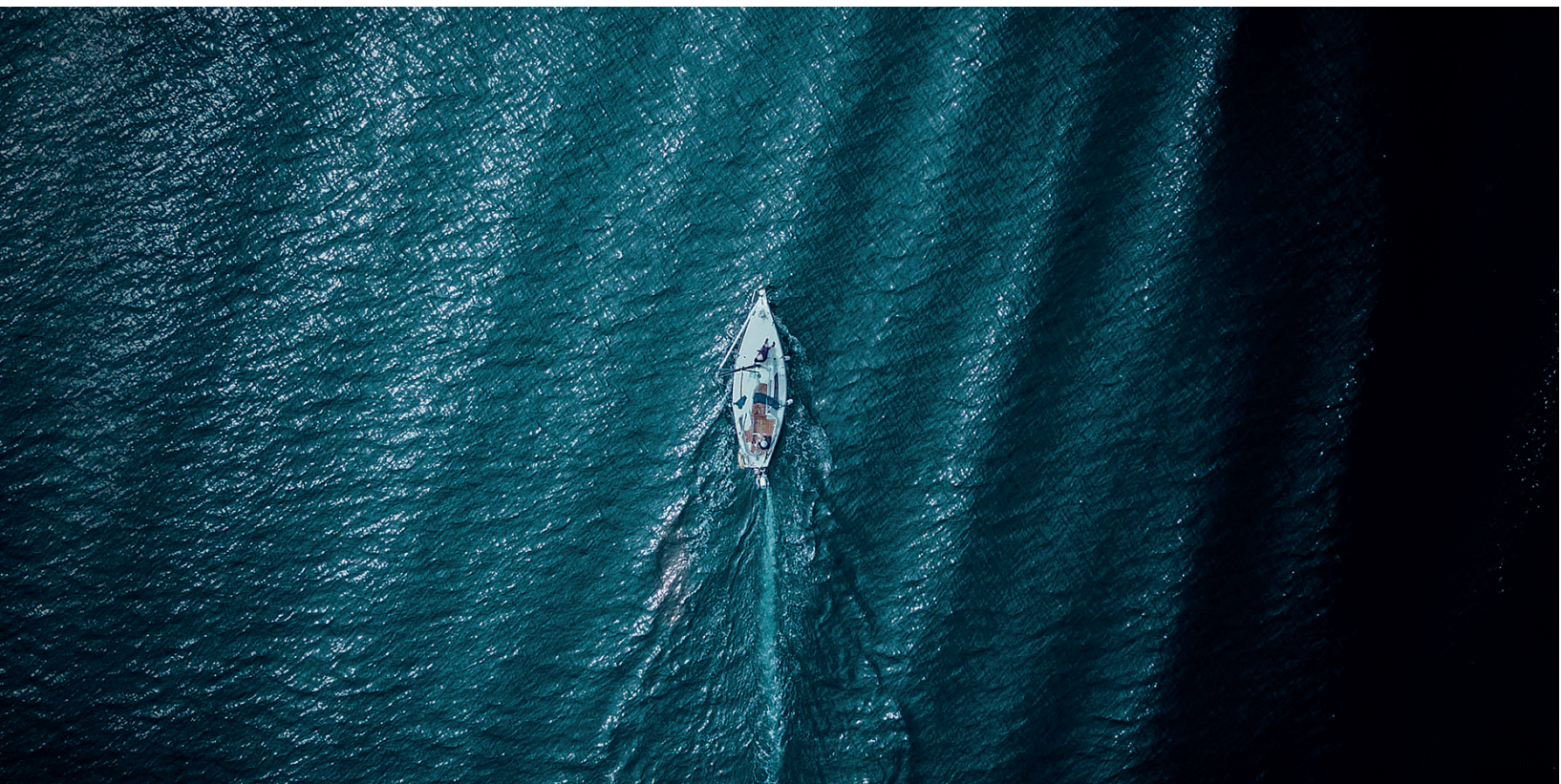
Logline: Three-part documentary tracing the decades-long hunt for a brutal killer across two sides of the Atlantic

Boston herself and, in 2016, finally finding his profile on Facebook.

“As she stared back at the man who she thinks killed her brother, she also finds his two sons who were present on the boat. Desperate for answers she messages the sons, demanding answers. The response she receives is shocking, leading to the case being re-opened,” reveals Van Dyke.

“Packed with gripping twists and turns, 1980s nostalgia and set in a tropical location, *Dead In The Water* has all the ingredients you’d expect from a high-quality boxset series,” adds Rachel Job, SVP of non-scripted content at All3Media International.

“Audiences all over the world will be captivated by this big budget series from Raw, the best in the business when it comes to boxset crime.”





Banged Up: Stars Behind Bars

Celebrities go behind bars in this new mix of reality series and social experiment that sees six famous faces locked up with real criminals who have all served time for serious crimes, including murder.

All are now reformed and have agreed to re-enter prison for this series, joining the celebrity inmates as they live by current UK prison rules. A former prison governor, with 20 years' experience in some of the UK's toughest prisons, and former prison officers are also drafted in.

"They have to live alongside real reformed criminals in a cramped cell for a week and survive in prison conditions: they eat, use the toilet, shower and exist with no privacy whatsoever," reveals Tim Whitwell, creative director at Shine TV.

"Prison forces you to live with others 24/7, there is no respite. Life inside UK prison is brutal, filthy, depressing and relentless. It tests character and resilience in an extreme way."

The well-known inmates also have the opportunity to talk to the reformed criminals about their prison

experiences and crimes – as well as examine the impact of the prison system on them, for better or worse.

Different celebrities responded in different ways to their week-long incarceration, says Whitwell. "All underwent personal journeys throughout the series. For some it was dealing with their own boredom, intimidation and also their own opinions and past mistakes."

Whitwell says that *Banged Up: Stars Behind Bars* has "huge potential to be adapted internationally" as it deals with universal themes of crime and punishment.

"Every country has prisons and criminals. Every country has to decide how to punish those who break its rules. Therefore, the format will resonate with audiences in a very visceral, familiar sense."

Producer: Shine TV

Distributor: Banijay Rights

Broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)

Logline: Six well-known male celebrity inmates are incarcerated alongside reformed criminals, including those who have served long sentences for serious crimes such as murder



Sherwood

Set in a 23rd Century London devastated by climate change, this 10 x 22-minute tween action-adventure series follows 15-year-old Robin Loxley, a bold, resourceful skyrunner and hacker who, along with her band of warriors, takes on the corrupt and oppressive regime of the evil Sheriff, Nottingham.

“Our vision was to forge an eclectic alliance of characters who, against all odds, form unbreakable bonds in their battle against evil,” shares Diana Manson, co-creator and executive producer on *Sherwood*. “We also wanted to create a formidable female lead and we got the chance to do that with Robin.

“Kids today are very concerned about climate

change and its impending impact on the future, so we constructed a world that is tinged with dystopian undertones, but also exciting and hopeful.”

Each episode sees Robin and her friends go on a new adventure as they unite to thwart the Sheriff, his goons and their squad of ‘Drobos’ – a hybrid of squid and robot. Their mission is to save their community, friends and family from the devastating 23rd Century effects of climate change.

Along the way, they venture into the submerged tube lines of historic London, the docks and shadowy alleys of the Lower City (aka Sherwood) and the floating Upper City, where the Sheriff and his elite reside.

“Kids will love the adrenaline-fuelled journey of *Sherwood* – the fast pace, the high stakes, and the visually stunning world,” says Manson. “Yet, amidst all the striking animation, action, and cool tech, kids will mainly be drawn to the characters and their rock-solid friendships.

“Robin, Iniko, Gripper and Rose are a bunch of relatable, down-to-earth teens who just happen to be caught up in a world-saving adventure.” **TBI**

Producer: Baby Octopus & Toybox

Distributor: Cake

Broadcaster: YouTube

Logline: The legend of Robin Hood is reborn in 15-year-old Robin Loxley, a hacker who takes on the oppressive regime of the evil Sheriff in a 23rd century London devastated by climate change

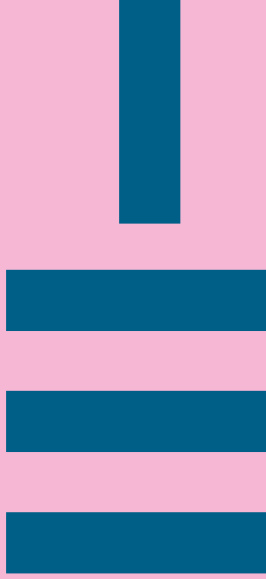


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Riding the co-pro trail

TV networks and streamers have tended to monopolise rights, but that mentality is changing in Spain as more collaborative financing models are sought to address increasingly ambitious dramas. Irene Jiménez reports

Spain is, along with the UK, one of the favourite European countries for streamers to produce fiction series. Data from a recent study by the European Audiovisual Observatory found that 34 shows were produced by streamers on Spanish soil in 2022.

And that number will surely have been maintained in 2023, a year in which Netflix alone has released 12 original Spanish series.

Streamers, including local services Atresplayer and Movistar Plus+, are the main drivers of the fiction industry in Spain, although national public broadcaster RTVE has also been accelerating its own productions.

The same study reveals that only 7% of international co-productions in Europe were fiction series in 2022 and most of them occurred between neighboring countries that, on many occasions, share the same language. In this sense, Spain should be having a more difficult time being a co-producing

partner, but the country of *La Casa De Papel* and *Veneno* maintains bilateral co-production agreements with countries such as Argentina, Canada, France, Portugal and Uruguay.

Furthermore, ICEX, an institute that promotes the internationalisation of Spanish companies, has identified the US, Canada, the UK, China, Korea, Japan, India and Turkey as strategic markets. With some of the most attractive tax incentive schemes in Europe and being part of the new Eurimages fund for series co-productions, Spain looks set to continue diversifying its financing models and drawing on foreign sources.

Little by little, the mentality of executives and producers is changing in a market in which, traditionally, television networks have limited themselves to carrying out production orders and monopolising all the rights. A good example of openness towards national and international co-

Zorro, from Secuoya Studios, announced its first international sales at MIPCOM

production is RTVE, whose on-demand platform, RTVE Play, premiered *This Is Not Sweden* at the end of November. The drama, a winner of the Prix Europa in 2023, was created by independent Catalan companies Funicular Films and Nanouk Films, and is a co-production of RTVE, the Catalan public broadcaster TV3, the production company Anagram Sweden, SVT of Sweden, NDR of Germany and YLE of Finland, financed with the support of public institutions such as ICEC of Catalonia and MEDIA of Europe.

“The most difficult part of the negotiations has been establishing the release strategy,” says Aina Clotet and Sergi Cameron, the main architects of *This Is Not Sweden*, which is also the first original scripted series for RTVE Play. As many producers point out, all operators want the first window but having gone through development laboratories such as Torino TFL Next TV Series, the series about the contradictions of parenthood premiered in full on RTVE Play one day after its linear launch on TV3. And the show still has the rest of its international career ahead of it.

Financing schemes

This Is Not Sweden followed in the footsteps of *Cicatriz*, the first co-production between Spain and Serbia. The thriller (8 x 45-minutes), based on the novel of the same name by Spanish author Juan Gómez-Jurado, is led by the independent Spanish company Plano a Plano, which produces with Dopamine and Serbia’s Adrenalin, in association with

RTVE, Prime Video España and Telekom Srbija. Also involved in the project is Asacha Media Group, which presented *Cicatriz* to the Serbian operator. “What happens in Chicago and Russia in the book happens in Bilbao and Belgrade in the series. We have changed the locations so that the co-production with Serbia makes more sense,” explains Emilio Amaré, general director of Plano a Plano, which has managed to preserve a high percentage of the show’s IP.

The financing scheme also benefits from Bilbao’s high tax incentives. For Telekom Srbija, *Cicatriz* is its first international project and for this reason it has been “deeply involved in the creative process, including casting and [details around] the Serbian plot. We are sure that the project will bring something new and fresh to the industry,” adds Aleksandra Martinović, director of the multimedia division of Telekom Srbija. *Cicatriz* will be seen first in Spain on RTVE and then on Amazon’s Prime Video, debuting in September 2024. RTVE is in charge of international sales.

Staying in Europe, *Lucio’s Treasure* marks Red Arrow Studios International’s first foray into the Spanish market. The miniseries is based on real events about the anarchist Lucio Uturbia, who defrauded a banking entity in the 1980s in true Robin Hood style. It is produced by Vértice 360, which was selected during the pitch sessions of Series Mania Forum, Conecta Fiction and MIA Market in Rome, together with Friki Films, which is based in Catalonia.

“We have been working for two years on the development and financing strategy of *Lucio’s Treasure*, a project that has a natural structure of



This Is Not Sweden is the first scripted original from RTVE Play



Cicatriz is the first co-production between Spain and Serbia

international co-production because its protagonist is Spanish, but the story takes place in Paris, and some characters are agents of the American CIA,” comments Rodrigo Herrera, VP of scripted acquisitions & co-productions at Red Arrow Studios International. In addition to its powerful story, Herrera looked at *Lucio’s Treasure* because it was in an incipient state, “without televisions or platforms on board,” meaning that the rights and distribution were available.

“Our idea is to delve into the collaboration model of multiple partners so as not to depend so much on a television or a platform giving the greenlight to a project,” says Sara Fernández Velasco, CEO of Grupo iZen. With production companies in Spain, the UK and a joint venture in the US called Cacao & Cía, iZen has produced *Memento Mori*, an exclusive series acquired by Prime Video for Spain and Portugal that has completed its financing with the guaranteed minimum from Newen Connect, which is in charge of international sales. It has also been supported by the contribution of Forta (regional public Spanish broadcaster), tax relief and the Valladolid City Council, which hosted much of the filming. “In this case, we preserved 100% of the intellectual property, which is wonderful news. Without a doubt, we run more risk, but we can be more agile in our decisions and have more independence. I think it is the most beneficial model for everyone, we are also using it in England and Latin America,” adds Fernández Velasco.

iZen is also working on two especially large

projects, one of them about spies in co-production with a UK partner, which will be filmed partly in English in 2024.

Indeed, the Spanish industry has countless examples of Amazon Prime Video ‘exclusive’ models, such as the most popular Spanish series domestically, the comedy *La Que Se Cerca*, by Contubernio Films, or *Zorro*, by Secuoya Studios, which unveiled its first international sales at MIPCOM 2023 via Mediawan Rights. There is also *Parot*, from Onza, whose sequel, *Perverso*, will be ready this year.

Partnerships are also being struck further afield, with several agreements announced between Spanish and Turkish companies. Across the pond in the US, several Spanish companies have chosen to open offices in LA, Miami and Mexico, while others have a network of companies in the region to produce directly from the Americas.

This is necessary because despite sharing a language and some history, co-production between Spain and Latin America is not as easy as it seems. The signs are positive, however, with Mediapro Studio’s development and production alliance with ViX delivering titles such as *Las Pelotaris, 1926*.

The TelevisaUnivision-owned streamer has also worked with another Spanish company, Onza Americas, on one of its 2023 series, *Isla Brava*, and maintains an agreement with the Spanish writer María Dueñas (*The Time Between Seams*) from which *Los Artistas* has already emerged. It is a co-production between Mexico’s 360 Powwow and Spain’s Isla Audiovisual that has released on Prime Video in Spain.

Other companies such as The Immigrant, which is backed by Fremantle, have made the trip in reverse and have landed in Madrid after beginning their journey in LA, Miami or Mexico.

Transatlantic relationships between streamers and networks are also evolving. Movistar Plus+, which in 2023 launched nine original fiction series, has collaborated with Telemundo on shows such as *Tell Me Who I am, El Inmortal* and, more recently, *The Dentist* and *Bellas Artes*. The latter is a comedy created by Argentines Andrés Duprat, Mariano Cohn and Gastón Duprat that will premiere in Latin America through Disney’s Star+ and will arrive in Spain through Movistar Plus+.

The Dentist, meanwhile, is a suspense period thriller that was filmed in Mexico with Chileans Pablo and Juan de Dios Larraín as producers. In this case, the series will premiere on ViX for America and in Spain through Movistar Plus+, which will also manage international sales of the fiction. It is another example of how companies are feeding their services while optimising budgets. **TBI**

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Having a moment

Miniseries & hard-hitting storylines, coupled with dedicated FAST channels & streamers, are creating exponential opportunity for Turkey's scripted content in established regions but also new markets, writes Andy Fry

The global export of Turkish drama has been one of the distribution success stories of the last two decades, with titles such as *Magnificent Century*, *1001 Nights*, *Ezel*, *Insider* and *Endless Love* becoming household names and winning legions of fans worldwide.

Barely missing a beat because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the value of sales hit a record breaking \$600m during 2022, according to figures released by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO).

Non-traditional market growth

A large part of this success is down to the continued popularity of Turkish drama in core markets including Latin America, Central & Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, India and the Middle East, where positive relations have been restored after a couple of frosty years. But there's also a strong sense among distributors that Turkish content has adapted well to changes in the content business – seizing new opportunities.



Golden Boy has been sold into Finland and Sweden

One key development, says Echo Rights director of Turkish drama Handan Ozkubat, has been progress in penetrating new non-traditional markets. Spain, Italy and Africa all joined the Turkish drama bandwagon in the pre-Covid era, and now France has followed suit – with M6 picking up *Brave And Beautiful* at MIPCOM.

According to Ozkubat, Echo's latest hit *Golden Boy* has sold to 100 territories, including Finland and Sweden. "We've established a strong presence in Sweden," she says, "with the sale of dramas including *The End* and *The Red Room* as well." *Golden Boy* also sold to MBC in the Middle East, underlining the recent rapprochement.

Just as significant as this expanding footprint has been the impact that Turkish drama exporters have had on both global and regional streamers. Goryana Vasileva, sales manager for OTT & Europe at Calinos, points to deals with the likes of Disney+, HBO Max, Amazon and Pluto, as well as regional players around the world. "One of our dramas, *Deeply*, had its debut on Serially in Italy in December," she adds.

This trend is confirmed by most leading Turkish exporters, with Echo's Ozkubat citing sales to the likes of HBO Max (Lat Am), Shahid and Etisalat (MENA) and Amazon India. Global Agency founder and CEO Izzet Pinto says his company is now working with "dozens of VOD platforms", while the company also struck its first deals with channels in Venezuela and Curaçao last year.

ATV Distribution head of sales Müge Akar is also pushing forward on both linear and streaming fronts. "This year we closed our first deals in Vietnam and Italy. As for the streaming platforms, we have expanded our reach via deals with the likes of Globoplay [in Brazil] and VIX and Canela TV in the US, with more to be announced."

Inter Medya founder and CEO Can Okan says that MENA, CEE and Latin American streamers have become key customers, with its crime drama *The Pit* finding audiences on MBC's Shahid in MENA and mini-series *Naked* breaking records on Brazil's Globoplay.

Linking back to the previous point about geographic expansion, Okan adds that miniseries are also opening up territories that hadn't normally acquired Turkish content. "We closed a package deal with Thailand's Monomax, a leading SVOD platform, and struck a deal in Italy for crime drama series *Interrupted*, an edgy story about a journalist who loses his life and comes back in a different body."

Keeping focus

An additional boost to Turkish drama's streaming growth has been the launch of dedicated SVOD

services. Public broadcaster TRT has launched Tabii, an international service available on platforms like YouTube and Roku for a fee, which runs hit series such as *Resurrection Ertuğrul* and *Hold My Hand*, with plans to introduce originals.

Also in the market is Kanal D Drama, an international offshoot of leading domestic broadcaster Kanal D. The service is currently in 15 countries and recently launched a 3,000-hour dubbed line-up on Amazon Prime Video in Chile and Colombia.

And while Turkey has always excelled in historical, crime and romance series, the changing customer base means there has been an evolution in the content line-up.

Global Agency, for example, is selling Fox Turkey hit *Another Love*, the story of "an anchorman and a prosecutor, drawn into an affair as they both seek to reveal the dark truth about a mysterious serial killer," says Pinto.

ATV Distribution's Akar says her company's upcoming title *Altın Kafes*, based on Korean series *The Last Empress*, is an intriguing romance/thriller hybrid, focusing on a rich heir and idealist teacher who fall in love against the backdrop of an assassination attempt.

Safir, which centres on the eldest son of a wealthy family who returns to Turkey after being educated in the US, has been a success in ATV's primetime and was recently licensed to Romania. "It has the local elements that make Turkish titles unique," says Akar, "but it is universal at the same time."

Inter Medya's Okan adds that his portfolio encompasses traditional dramas, miniseries and films. "Our miniseries typically consist of between eight and 25 episodes with edgier and fast-paced narratives. They offer an opportunity to reach countries where there may not have been a previous habit of consuming Turkish scripted content."

Examples include psychological thriller *Respect*, centred around a sociopathic character. Okan also notes that negotiations are underway with streamers and linear TV channels in Australia and Sweden for *The Ivy* and *Dreams & Realities*.

Formats & co-productions

The Turkish contingent has also doubled down on scripted formats to grow its footprint. Global Agency's Pinto cites deals in Bulgaria and has just sealed a remake for *Another Love* in Greece, while an unnamed US network is "evaluating" another project.

Underlining the thawing of relationships with the Middle East, Global Agency also licensed the format for *1001 Nights* to MBC. Following another adaptation of this show in India, the MBC version, *Sara*, performed well and has been sold in Lat Am and CEE.

“Miniseries offer an opportunity to reach countries where there may not have been a previous habit of consuming Turkish content”

Can Okan,
Inter Medya



Others report similar successes. Romania’s Pro TV is remaking Echo-distributed *Insider*, says Ozkubat, “and we have also just closed some format deals in India”. Another Romanian network, Antena 1, is up to four seasons on Calinos-distributed *That’s My Life* (locally known as *Adela*), says Vasileva. “Now the channel is remaking romantic comedy *No: 309*. We also licensed *That’s My Life’s* format to Africa.”

Such trends are apparent across the industry. ATV Distribution has licensed the formats for *A Little Sunshine*, *For My Family*, *Foster Mother* and *Lifeline* into markets including Mexico and Spain, says Akar. Mexico, meanwhile, has also been a hot market for Inter Medya, with formats rights to *Red Scarf*, *Black Money Love* and *The Light of Hope* all being picked up recently. Additional Inter Medya scripted format deals include *Bitter Lands* to Greece and *Forgive Me* to Iraq.

With global budgets for scripted content under pressure, Turkish firms have also become more open to collaboration, says Calinos’s Vasileva, who adds that her company is “trying to focus more on cross-border

Unpacking Netflix’s Turkish drama strategy

Netflix has been influential in the global growth of Turkish drama in recent years. Initially a buyer, the streamer now invests in originals, says Pelin Distas (right), director of series in Turkey, with shows like *Shahmaran*, *Who Were We Running From?* and *The Tailor* all in its Top 10 non-English series lists in more than 50 countries.



“We showcased bold stories such as *The Creature*, a unique take on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and returning seasons of *The Club*, with *As The Crow Flies* launching on 14 December”

Despite the current downturn in the global scripted market, Distas says Netflix is maintaining its commitment to Turkish content. “We’re actively developing a strong and diverse 2024 slate of shows. These include *Kubra* (pictured, right), *A Round Of Applause*, *Thank You Next*, and *Art Of Love* as well as beloved shows returning for new seasons such as *Ersan Kumeri*, *Another Self*, and *In Good Hands*, just to name a few.”

Distas says the platform has built strong local relationships, building on the formation of an office in Istanbul two years ago. “Now, we’re fully integrated into the Turkish creative ecosystem,” she says, adding that the streamer is supporting new voices such as Özgür Önürme, “who debuted as a writer and director with *Fatma*, a Netflix series that gained success and was adapted in South Africa. “Özgür is now developing a new show, *Asaf*, for Netflix.

On the film side, adds Distas, *Last Call For Istanbul* starring Beren Saat and *Kivanç Tatlıtuğ* was a Top 10 Non-English film in over 70 countries in December, underlining global demand.

Echoing a theme in the main story, Distas says that Netflix is also looking to foster “bold stories that might have otherwise remained untold,” pointing to shows such as *Kubra*. The company is also experiencing the scripted format trend noted above, “creating global opportunities for Turkish talent, just like we did with Ece Yörenç, whose script has been adapted into an amazing Netflix show in Spain.”



Leylifer was coproduced by Inter Medya and Colombia-based Caracol International

co-productions as well as partnerships with streaming platforms.”

Okan says his company’s co-production journey began with a partnership alongside NBCU’s Telemundo Global Studios, with *Hicran* and the first premium series, *Blue Cage*, now completed.

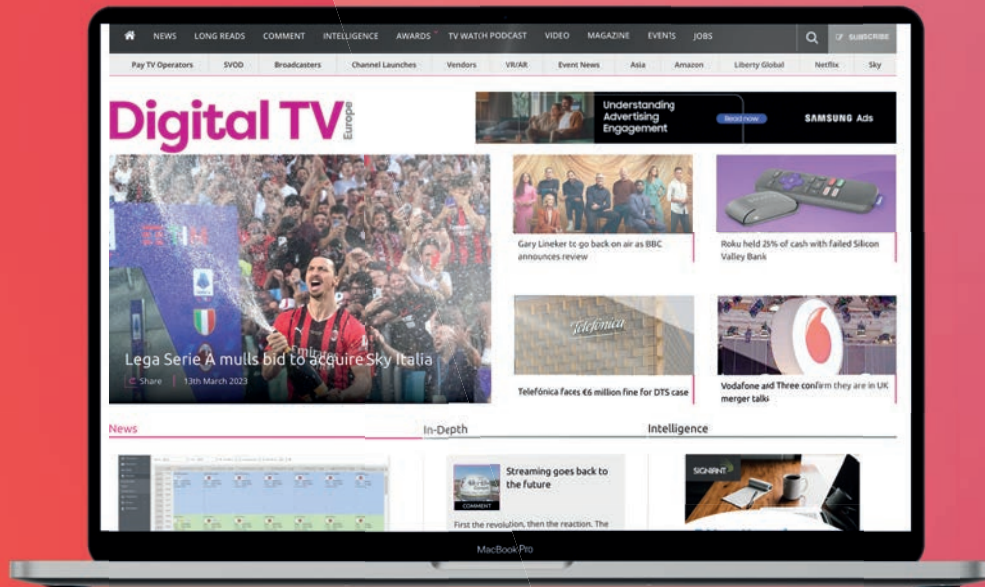
Following this milestone, Inter Medya signed a co-production agreement with Colombia’s Caracol International, resulting in a show called *Leylifer*. Most recently, Okan announced a co-production agreement with Mega Global Entertainment, led by Esperanza Garay. The first series from that partnership will be unveiled in January.

There are also new avenues for growth emerging. One area that Turkish content companies are starting to explore is FAST, which is well suited to scripted product from the country.

“We have done quite a few FAST channel deals in the US and Lat Am, for example with Samsung TV Plus in Brazil,” says Vasileva, while Okan adds that Inter Medya is “on the verge” of launching its own FAST channels in Lat Am and MENA.

For Turkish content creators and distributors, the direction of travel is clear. **TBI**



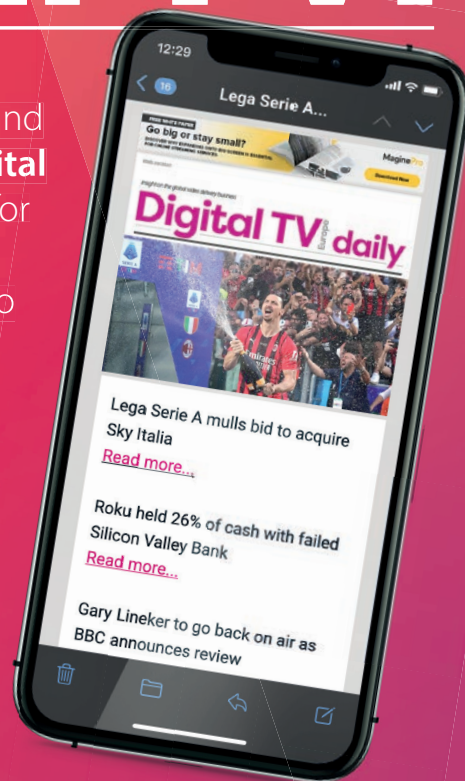


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Last Word Sam Joyce

Korea's factual breakthrough

“Korean broadcasters retain a healthy appetite for imported factual. Perhaps because of this, domestic productions are frequently internationally appealing in form”

It is hardly breaking news that Korea's content industry produces massive international hits; while *Parasite* and *Squid Game* have marked two of the biggest recent breakthroughs in the globalisation of Korean content, these are merely the latest successes in a long-term trend with its roots back in the early 2000s, when films like *Oldboy* and *The Host* gained international acclaim.

Whilst the country's documentary output has been a little slower to travel, it seems that could be all about to change. Global platforms like Netflix and Amazon's Prime Video have tapped internationally recognised Korean talent as key fixtures in their recent factual slates, with docs like *Blackpink: Light Up The Sky*, *BTS: Bring The Soul* and *The Yellow Door* unsurprisingly making international waves. Similarly, Korean formats are travelling the world, from MBC's global hit *The Masked Singer* to the recent UKTV commission of *Battle In The Box*. At TVF International, our own K-Pop doc *Mamamoo: Where Are We Now?*, which goes behind the scenes with the titular band, has enjoyed a streamer berth with Netflix outside of Korea.

But away from the country's growing stable of internationally recognised celebrities like Jung Kook and Jennie Kim, a less talent-centric documentary breakthrough could be in the offing. With robust sources of government funding, strong incentives for international cooperation, and a significant network of domestic platforms, Korea's doc industry contains a wealth of opportunity for international collaboration.

Korea's industry is presided over by KOCCA and RAPA, two government agencies who coordinate international events and award funding for production, development and localisation. These agencies offer strong support for ambitious local productions, while working to platform completed Korean productions at international markets, and to host events that allow for vital connections to be forged between producers, broadcasters and distributors.

The strength of local production undergirds a broadcasting landscape with ample opportunities for documentaries to connect with domestic audience. With four national terrestrial broadcasters, a host of cable and premium pay channels, widely watched domestic

streamers like TVing and Wavve, and an extensive network of regional broadcasters, there are many platforms for domestically-produced content to find an audience and – crucially – for producers to unlock commissions and broadcast placements.

Unlike some other content markets in Asia, Korean broadcasters also retain a healthy appetite for imported factual. Perhaps because of this, domestic productions are frequently internationally-appealing in their form, with few of the territory-specific stylistic idiosyncrasies that can sometimes limit how widely projects sell.

And while not every documentary is suitable for international sales, healthy budgets, a talent for ensuring money ends up on-screen, world-leading technical expertise with UHD quotas for broadcasters, an openness to international collaboration, and government support for international versioning means many Korean projects have real potential to travel. Take, for example, *Alleys: Off the Beaten Track* from Busan's local MBC station. This docuseries, which is now in its fourth season, visits locations around the world with the help of a diverse array of local photographers who have the inside track for the best spots in town. The international locations, multiplicity of spoken languages and beautiful photography made the show a great prospect for distribution. Similarly, TVF launched EBS's *Galapagos: Edge Of The World* at MIPCOM and the wildlife series has sold across Asia, Iberia and CEE.

TVF is also currently working with producer The Plant on an international version of UXN's *Planet Of Machines*, which tells a global story spanning Bolivia, China, England, Jordan and Korea – to name just a few – about how industrialisation once unlocked humanity's potential, but now holds our fate in its AI-assisted hands. These kind of large-scale, conceptually ambitious and slickly produced projects find natural homes with eyeball-hungry programmers around the world.

The factual distribution landscape relies on finding stories with local specificity but international appeal, and while K-Pop's roster of stars may have proven the Trojan Horse to take Korean docs to the world, the industry's deep experience and outstanding production quality seem primed to help Korean docs of all genres ride the Hallyu Wave to shores far and wide. **TBI**

Sam Joyce is acquisitions & content strategist at factual distributor TVF International, where he collaborates with producers on co-productions, pre-sales and distribution

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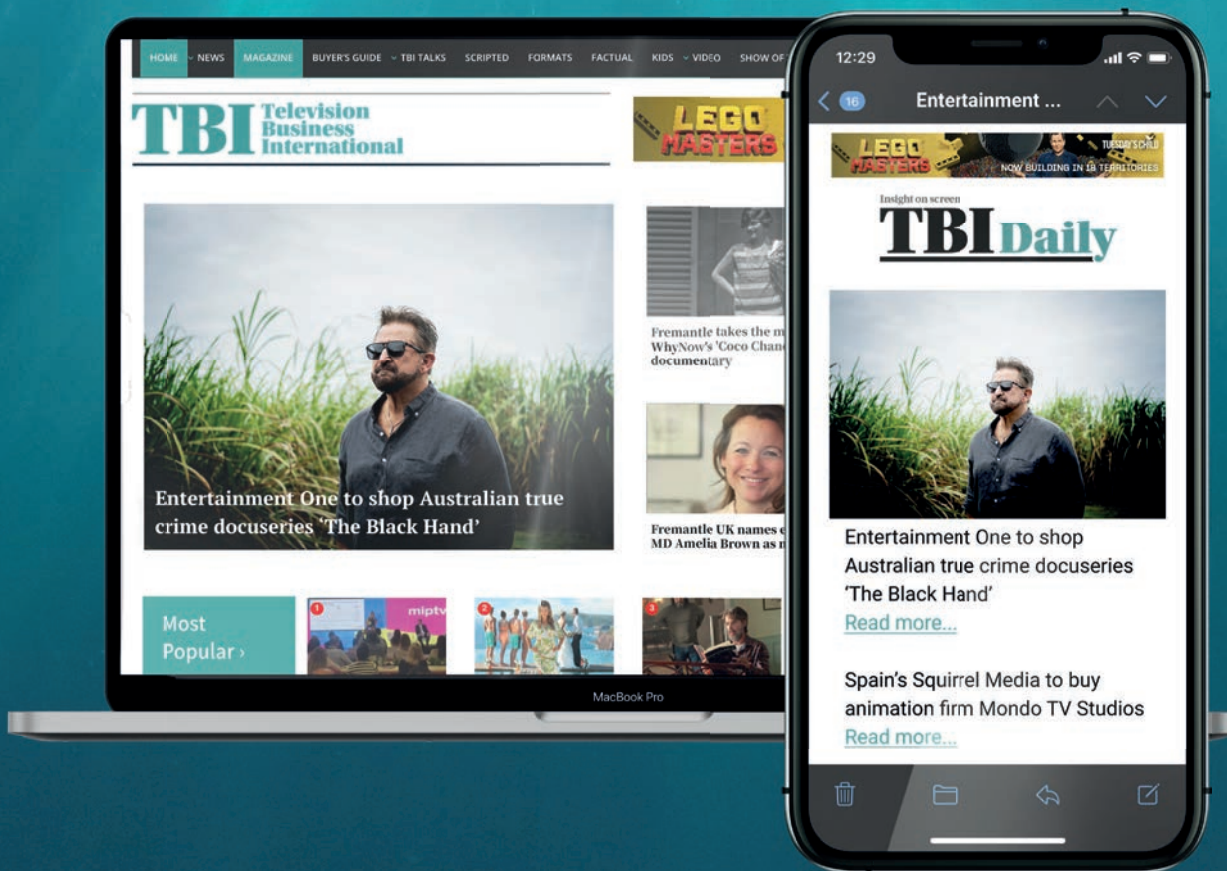
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