

The background features a large, stylized yellow arrow pointing towards the top right, set against a white background. The arrow is composed of several overlapping geometric shapes, creating a sense of movement and direction.

Master Class: Creative Distribution - Bringing Your Film to Your Audience

Sundance Co//ab With Jon Reiss

www.8above.com

Part 1:
THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE
GOALS
AUDIENCE



THE BROKEN LANDSCAPE



Previous Paradigm Was Based on Scarcity

- Before the 1950s – only one way to view films: In a Theater.
- Production was costly, exhibition vertically integrated.
- The number of films released in any year was in the hundreds.



Monetizing this Paradigm Was Based on Scarcity

- As new technologies developed studios were able to control monetization through windows.
- Starting with the highest \$ per view to the lowest.



Monetizing the Current Paradigm is Based on Subscribers and Subscriber Growth

- Streaming platforms, as the largest players in the industry, have redefined film economics.
- They are not concerned with the monetization of each piece of content. They are concerned with subscriber growth and retention.
- In search for subscribers - they are now going after the middle - not the edge - becoming more and more like 80's television - with some exceptions.



Fewer Buyers of Content

- Streamers who were acquiring content are now mainly focused on creating their own content.
- But they have in turn killed off many other revenue streams:
 - Owning/renting content - eg TVOD/DVD
 - Theatrical
 - Educational
 - Etc.



WE ARE IN AN AGE OF ABUNDANCE

50,000-100,000 - Feature Films Made a Year

4000-5000- Submitted to Sundance

600- travel on the global festival circuit at a higher level

80- Get into Sundance (that's 1.8%)

On a good year (40 might get good deals)

Even if 100 get good traditional deals – it's such a small percentage of the overall output

Last year 14 sold at Sundance. 19 films in the fest already had distribution.

8 Billion Videos uploaded to Tik Tok every year.

Over 2500 years of content uploaded to YouTube every month.



Age of Abundance:

- Money is not the only cost factor in a consumer's mind
- Time is as important (or more) now as money.
- Consumers rely more and more on what they subscribe to already.

So Now the Main Issue is How Do You Break Through all of this noise. How do you make a dent in the media landscape.



HOPE -

There Is An Audience for Independent Film

Keri Putnam's New Study - US Independent Film Audience & Landscape Study

Some of the key findings:

- There is a large market for independent film in the US - potentially 77 million people.
- Currently only 37 million are engaged - 40 million untapped market.
- Of the 37 million - 24 mil watch Docs, 17 mil watch fiction.
- Definite desire for alternatives to mainstream programming.

THE OVERALL DEAL

In which a distributor buys all rights either foreign or domestic or both usually for 15-20 years.

In exchange for this level of control, an advance is paid.
(hopefully)



THE OVERALL DEAL

PROS AND CONS

Pros

- You can make a lot of money.
- Someone else was responsible for releasing your film, you could move on to the next project
- If it was high enough profile – it could help launch your career.

Cons

- Very few make financial sense
- Your rights are locked up with one company for a long time - and if they don't perform . . .
- Films often drop out of sight within a week or two of release.
- Loss of Control and Accountability
- Most filmmakers are frustrated with them.

**When You Leave
The World of
the Overall Deal
You Are in the Realm Of:**

SPLIT RIGHTS

- Where each right available to be distributed is handled separately either with a distribution partner or DIY.
- You Run The Show – You control your destiny. But you need to do the work.
- You can choose the best and most cost effective ways to release and market your film.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPAL:

Every Film and Filmmaker is Different

Thus Every Film Deserves a Unique Distribution and Marketing Plan.



8 Essential Components for Distribution Strategy

- Goals
- The Film
- Stage
- Audiences
- How to Reach Those Audiences
- Film Rights/Split Rights
- Windowing
- Your Resources



FOUR GOALS

*You get 1 or maybe 1.5 not all
(except in rare exceptions).*

- Money
- Career
- Impact: Change the World
- Audience: Getting your film seen



My Love Affair With Marriage

Goal: Audience

Animated feature about a spirited young woman determined to find love in the bewildering world.

Latvia/Luxembourg/US co production



Keys Bags Names Words

Goal: Change the World -
Awareness

Feature Documentary:
Dementia is one of the greatest
fears of people today. This
documentary shifts that
narrative of fear and
hopelessness to one of hope and
action.

Independently financed



Sam Now

Goal: Career Elevate the film and the filmmakers.

Feature documentary - What happens when a boy and his brother go on a road trip in search of their missing mom?

Independent financing. ITVS Co-production. With Independent financing.



Hundreds of Beavers

Goal: Money - pay back investors to make another movie slightly higher budget

Fiction Feature: In this 19th century, supernatural winter epic, a drunken applejack salesman must go from zero to hero and become North America's greatest fur trapper by defeating hundreds of beavers.

Independent financing.



CAREER

Consider Career Goals Alongside The Film's
Distribution Goals



SOME CAREER CONSIDERATIONS

- Do you want to be more entrepreneurial - eg develop a direct relationship with audience?
- Do you want to try to work in series or other areas where press/prestige is important?
- Do you make films that appeal to a similar audience and enable you to market to similar audiences or are your films more diverse with diverse audiences.



THE FILM

Uniqueness/Brand

- What unique attributes does your film have?
- What is the “brand” of your film?
- Are there similar films - what makes your film distinct?

Is the film ready?

- Is your film the best it can be?
- Have you screened it to impartial audiences?
- What has been the reaction?



THE FILM - My Love Affair With Marriage

“Brand” Considerations?

- Feminist animated film for adults.
- Personal story/art film/complex.

Test Screenings

- Start out small with Zoom test screenings -
- Multiple test screenings.



THE FILM: Keys Bags Names Words

Brand:

The first film about dementia that provides hope and gives positive steps to action.

Readiness:

Film had not been screened.

Was too long.

Cut 15 minutes out of the film.

Performed much better.



THE FILM: Hundreds of Beavers

Brand:

Comedic black and white period silent film that with a lot of wrestling - nothing else like it.



Stage

Factors that affect your release include:

- Where are you at in the process?
- Are you thinking about audience/distribution and marketing throughout the process?
- Any distribution deals/pre-sales set?

Stage: Sam Now

Had a deal with ITVS which limited their sales potential in the US since the Pay 1 window was gone.

Created distribution around that - theatrical, other VOD rights, educational.



Stage: My Love Affair With Marriage

Factors affecting NA release:

- 100 film festivals
- Had sold multiple other territories.
- Took back NA rights - no sales had been made.
- Had approached other distributors
- Decided to do a theatrical to change their chances.



AUDIENCE

+ *HOW TO REACH THAT AUDIENCE*



AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IS A

FOUR STEP PROCESS

1. Who is/are your audience (s)?
2. What value do you provide your audience?
3. Where do they received information and recommendations?
4. How does your audience consume media?



WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE

The foundation of a good release campaign is knowing **WHO** your audience is. And **HOW** you will connect with your audience.

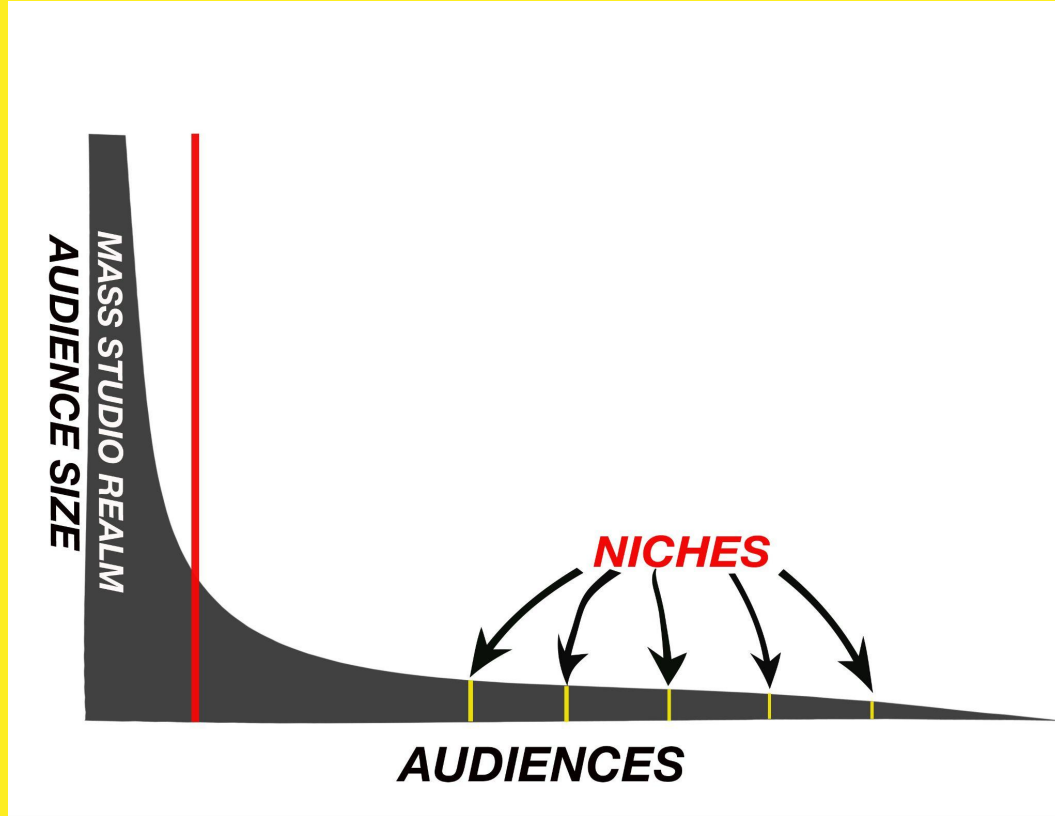
Niche Audience

Core within Niche

Start as early as possible



NICHE AUDIENCE



#1 Who is Your Audience?

Core Audience

- Communicates to the broader audiences within the niche.
- Are your most ardent supporters/fans
- They will promote for you
- Perhaps support you



SECONDARY and TERTIARY AUDIENCES

- Larger audiences within each niche
- Increasingly harder to access as you move away from the core.

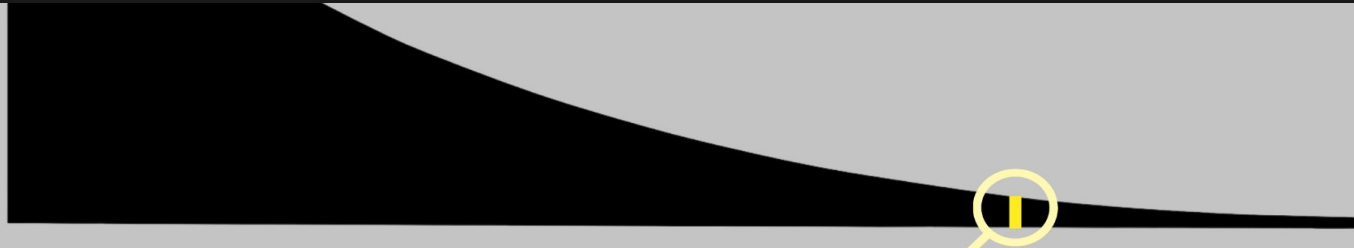
Keys Bags Names Words: Audiences

Niche: People interested in Alzheimers and Dementia

Caregivers
Seniors
Those caring for seniors.

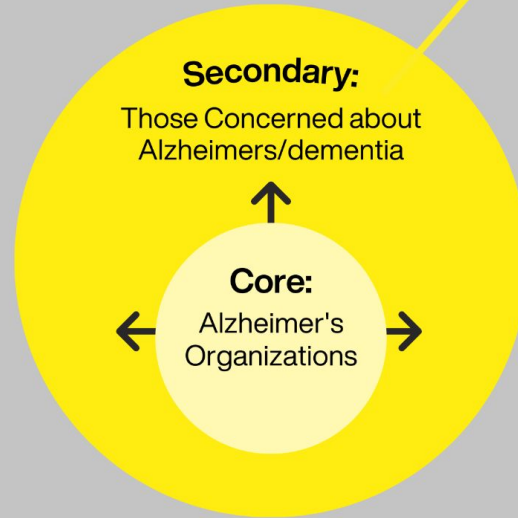


Keys Bags Names Words: Core



Core:
Alzheimer's
Organizations

Keys Bags Names Words: Secondary



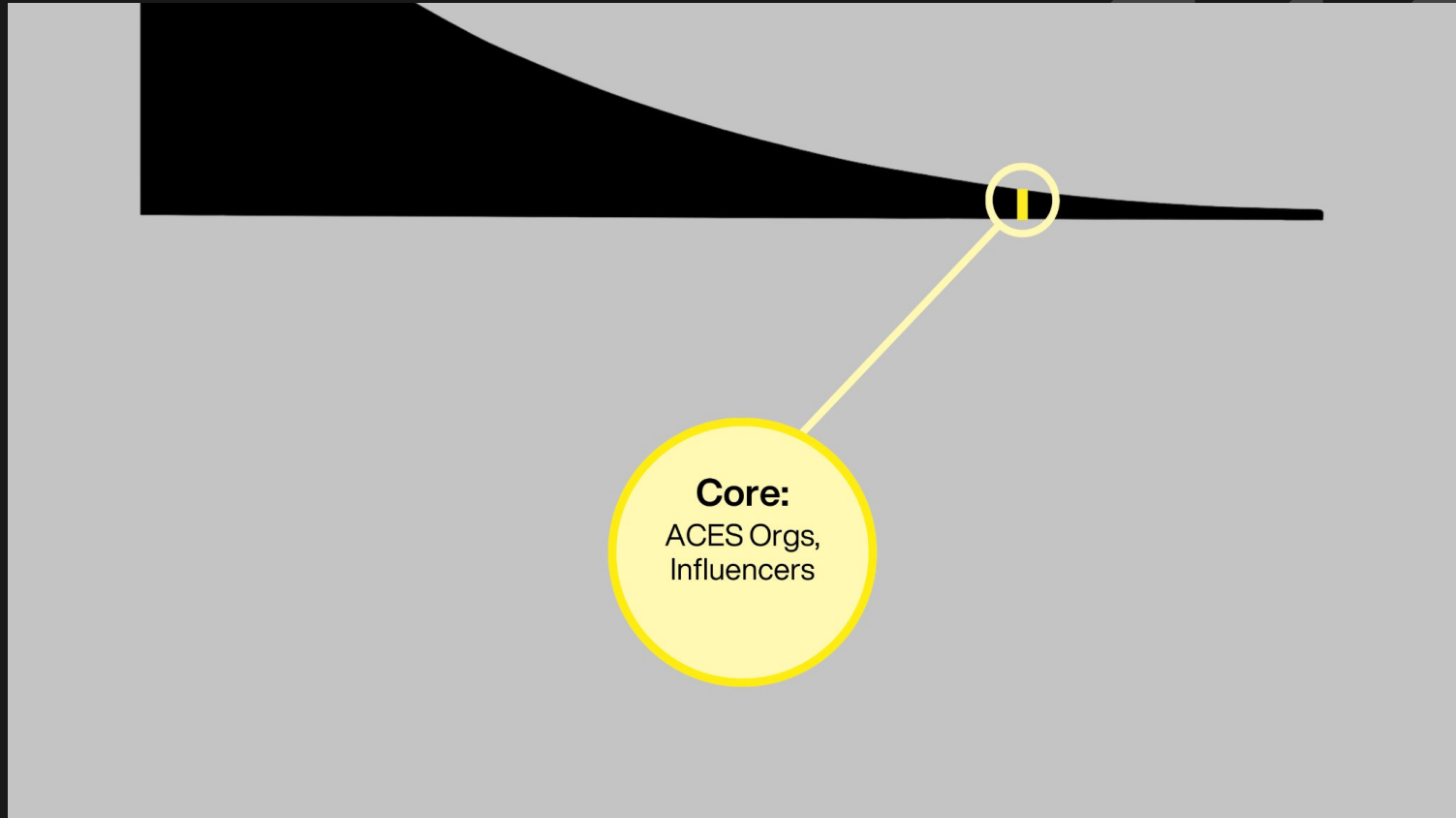
Sam Now: Audiences

Niches: Adverse
Childhood
Experiences (ACES)

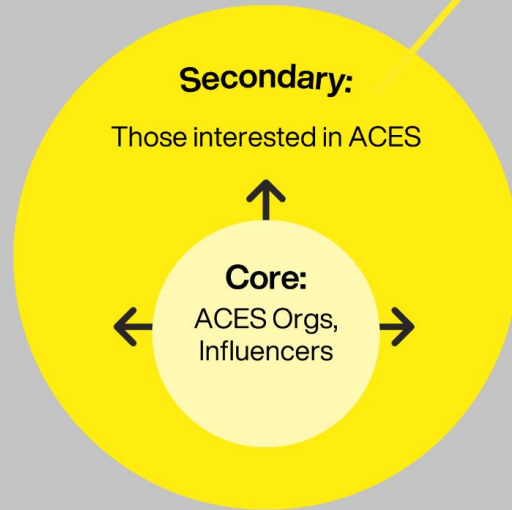
Doc geeks: Archive,
editing, style.



Sam Now: Core

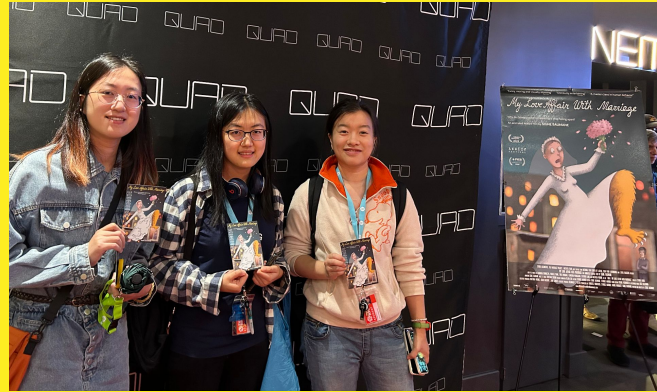


Sam Now: Secondary

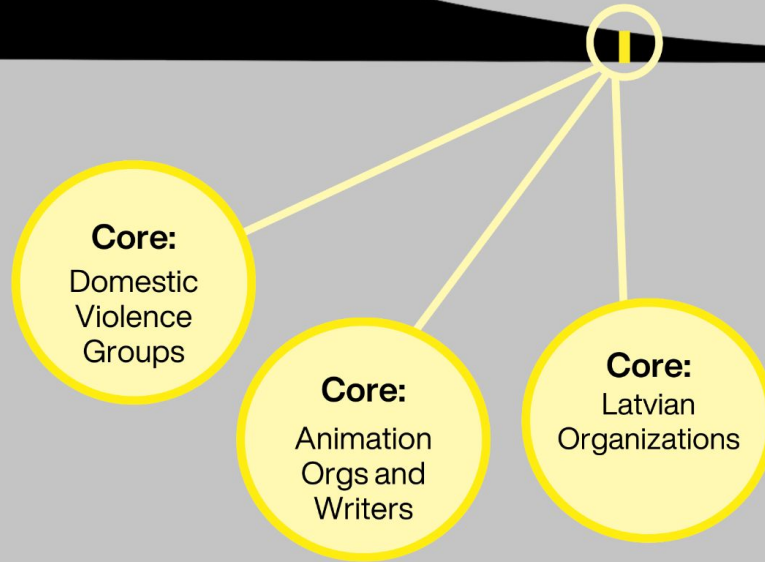


My Love Affair With Marriage: Audiences

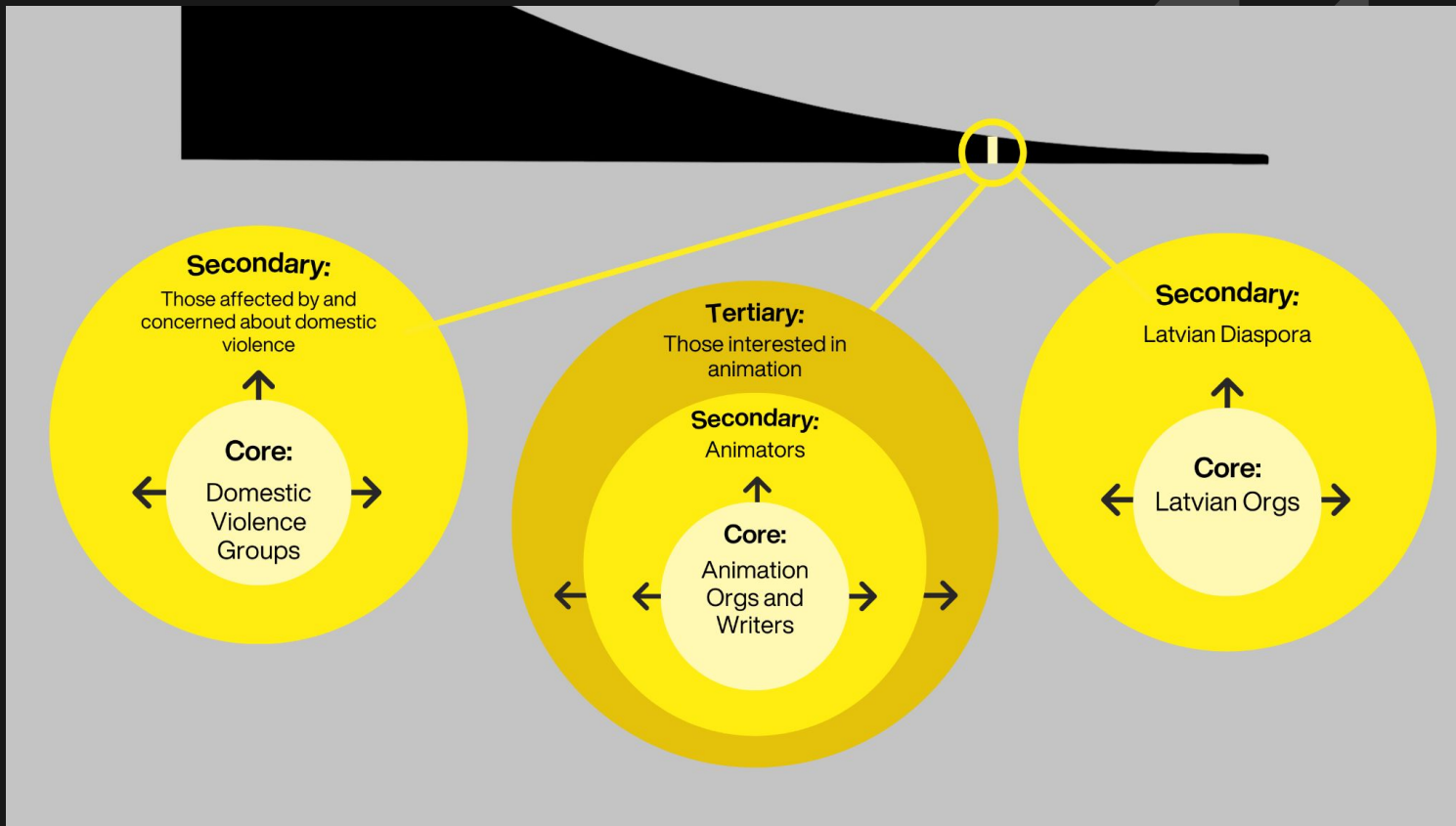
Audiences:
Domestic Violence
Latvian
Animators



My Love Affair with Marriage: Core



My Love Affair with Marriage: Secondary



Hundreds of Beavers

Initial thoughts -
middle aged dads.

In festivals - they
realized there
audience was:

1. Gen Z creators and
letterboxd rankers
2. Millennial Nerds like us
3. Gen X collectors &
physical media aficionados
4. Boomers - the turner
classic movies crowd



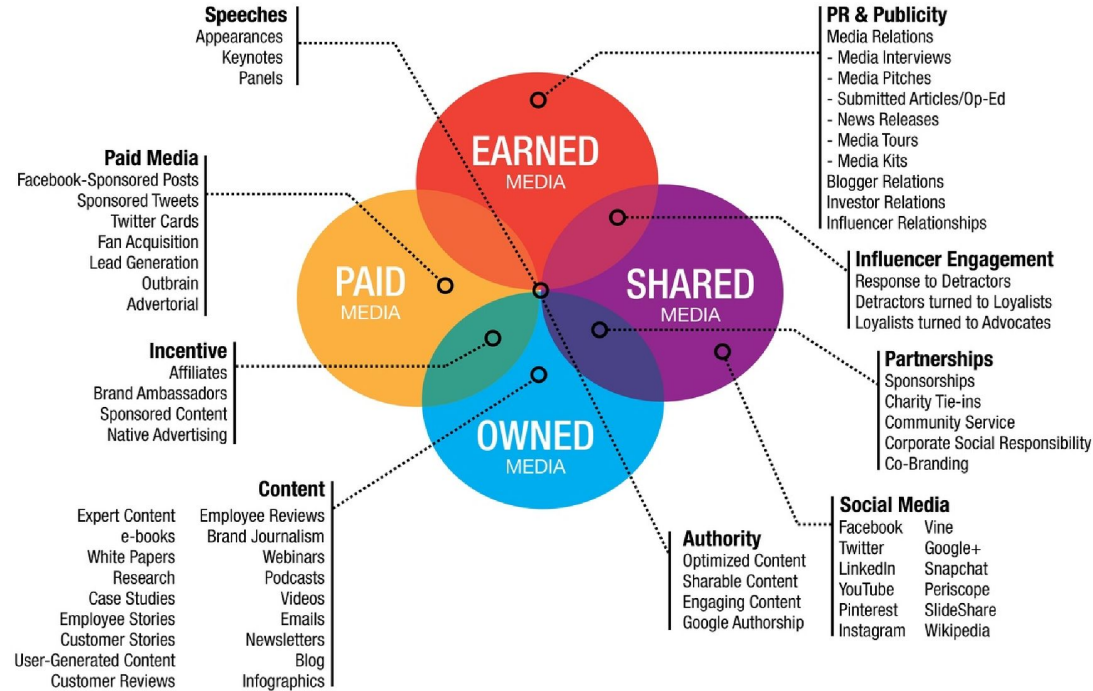
Questions?

Part 2:

REACHING AUDIENCE



PESO MODEL: As and Organizing Tool



Adapted from Spin Sucks

Types of “Media” in Marketing

Owned media - Media that you control completely. Your film, your extra content, distributed through platforms that you control:

- Email

- Short content

- Website

Shared Media - Media distributed by a 3rd Party - eg an organization or platform such as social media platforms. They control the audience. You are providing the media.

- Social Media

- Partnerships

- Influencers

Types of Media

Paid Media - Media Distributed via some form of payment - eg Advertising.

Social Advertising

Print Advertising etc.

Earned Media: Media about your film/product that is created by someone else on other people's platforms. Reviews by reviewers or the audience.

Press

Customer Reviews



Owned Media

OWNED MEDIA: Email List

Much higher conversion rate.

Start your mailing list and collect email addresses from everyone you encounter at the very beginning.

Incentivize People to Join - Gated Content

People are Reluctant to Join Email Lists - Can you exchange a piece of content?



OWNED MEDIA: Website

You need a website.

It is the only site that you own and control.

Start with a simple Squarespace site – add Mailchimp for email sign up.

You can add a blog if you are so inclined – but it depends on the film and your time.

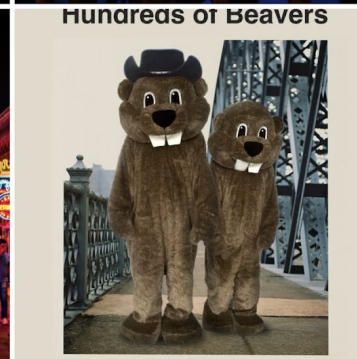
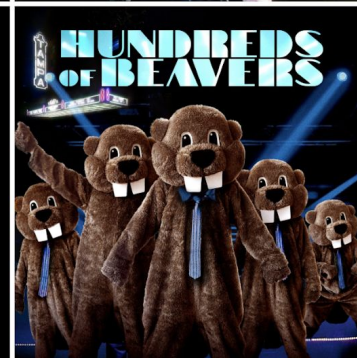
OWNED MEDIA: Content

- Marketing Materials: Trailer, Key Art, Photos
- Other short form content that can be either used on your social or shared with partners.
- What Value You Provide Your Audience Depends on the Audience



OWNED MEDIA:

Hundred of Beavers



Hundreds of Beavers: Owned Media Gifs



Shared Media

SHARED MEDIA: Partnerships

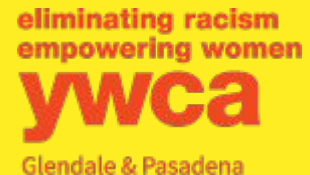
- Working with Organizations who Have a Common interest or Goal
- How does this help you?
 - They connect with your audience for you.
- DIFY: Do It For You
- Find Organizations that Relate to Your Core Audience – research.
 - Connect With Those Organizations – make the call.
 - Convey what is in it for them. Find out what their goals are. How can you help them achieve those goals?
 - Connect early on – involve them in the process as appropriate



My Love Affair With Marriage

Partnerships:
Domestic Violence
Groups
Animation Groups
Latvian Groups
Women in Film

Created events
during theatrical -
primary driver of
audience.



Keys Bags Names Words

Partnerships:



SHARED MEDIA: Influencers

- People with large followings on Social Media – or large email lists
- Bloggers
- Celebrities
- Musicians
- Etc. depends on who your audience is.

Determine and Connect with Influencers

Who has a connection to your audience?

What's in it for them?

Be respectful and patient – they know that you need them more than vs vs.

Timing of Influencers - when do you need the influencers

Pay to Play -

There are influencer agencies now.

Micro influencers can have an effect - 5,000 10,000 50,000 followers



Hundreds of Beavers: Influencers

Hired an Influencer Marketing Agency

Had great merchandise.

Sent packages to film influencers who did videos opening the packages

Did this for the VOD Release



OUTREACH SPREADSHEET

- One for each niche.
- Metadata: Keywords that you will tag blog posts, research blogs.
- Organizations
- Blogs
- Influencers: Celebrities, Musicians, Actors, Social Media Stars, Academics- depends on your audience
- Facebook pages & groups
- Twitter
- Other Films
- Traditional journalists and publications
- Schools

SHARED MEDIA: Social

- Where does your audience reside in the online space?
- What social networks do they use?
- Use to amplify what you are already doing.

Social Media Best Practices

- Be Authentic
- Start By Listening
- Be Respectful of the Community
- It's Not About Numbers – It's about Engagement
- Connect and create real relationships.
- Provide value to your supporters – send them information relevant to them.
- 80/20 Rule – Only 20% is promoting you.

Hundreds of Beavers: Social Media

One of the most effective parts of their campaign.

Created memes.

Inspired fan content

Constantly engaging fans.

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)



Earned Media

Publicity- Traditional Press

- Is important especially if your goal is career.
- Can also be useful for paid advertising – promoting reviews.
- Is difficult in a crowded media landscape.
- Consult with publicist early - they are very smart marketing strategists - create relationships.



Earned Media: Sam Now

Theatrical release
triggered a lot of press.



Earned Media: My Love Affair With Marriage

Theatrical release also triggered a lot of press.



Keys Bags Names Words

Small Theatrical in
SF triggered press.

Can get coverage
where there is a
local angle.



Referrals/Recommendations



Referrals/Advocates

- This is where the groundwork of Owned and Shared Media pay off.
- Starting in festivals – encourage people to write reviews – utilize the email list. IMDB and Letterboxd for early.
- Collect sentiment for website and social.
- When the film is in release encourage core audience to post reviews on all relevant sites:
 - Imdb and Letterboxd
 - But add:
 - Rotten Tomatoes (start in theatrical)
 - Amazon (start in TVOD)

PAID MEDIA



Paid Media: Paid Social

- You need someone on your team that knows how to use Meta Business Manager - or you can hire an ad manager.
- Much greater reach with paid than organic.
- See what posts are gaining traction and boost them.
- Not as effective for theatrical - and more expensive.
- Best when the film is more widely available.
- Spend \$3K+ probably need to spend \$10K+ depends on your goals and strategy.

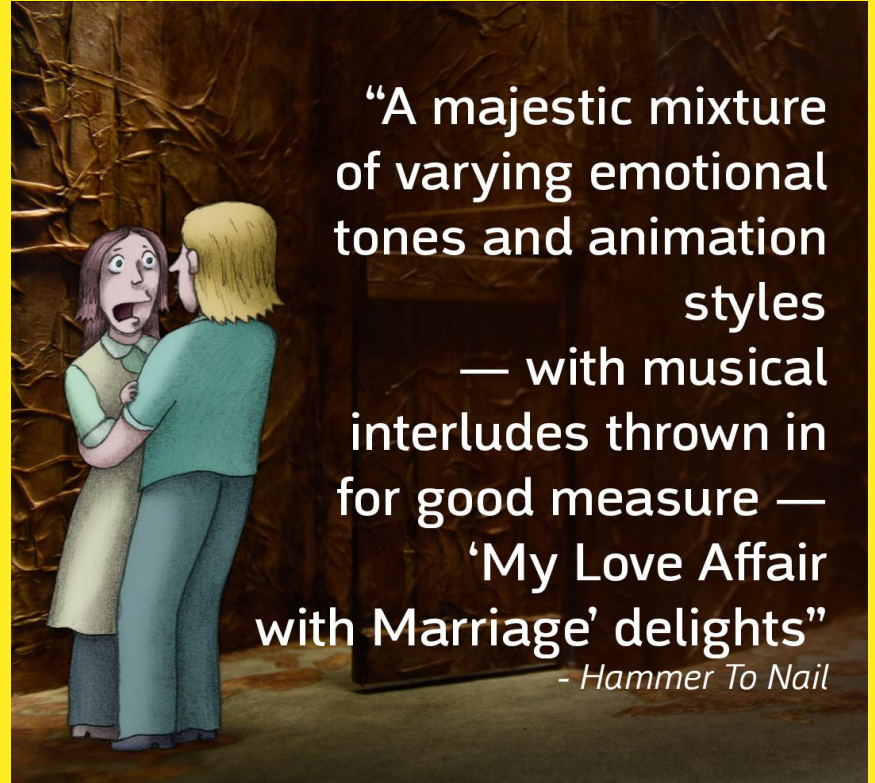


Paid Media: My Love Affair With Marriage

Did a fair amount of paid social.

It didn't move the needle for theatrical.

But helped build awareness for the film.



Paid Media: Other

- Letterboxd - more for fiction
- Podcast ads - starts around \$5K-\$10K
- Radio ads - starts \$5K-\$10K

Who is your audience?

Where do they get recommendations?



Questions?

Part 3:

FILM RIGHTS



REDEFINITION OF FILM RIGHTS

- We should recategorize film rights to enable so as to make the distribution process more effective for filmmakers.

1. EVENT/THEATRICAL
2. DIGITAL
3. EDUCATIONAL
4. MERCHANDISE



EVENT THEATRICAL



IN WHICH THE FILM IS SCREENED IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE

Any place. Any time. Any media.



CONSUMER EXPERIENCE:

Communal Unique

A live communal experience unavailable anywhere else.



If this consumption is driven by community and experience – then artists should create live events that create community and provide unique experiences.

THREE MAIN AVENUES FOR LIVE EVENT/THEATRICAL BOOKINGS

- Film Festivals
- Conventional Theatrical
- Alternative Theatrical /Grassroots/Community
includes, Semi and Non theatrical



CONFERENCES

- Can be a strong way to meet your audience and screening partners - people from multiple organizations.
- Need to plan well in advance.
- If possible try to get on the plenary - with a short clip and presentation.
- Or 2nd best - screen the film - helpful in order to connect with people at the conference.



Conferences Keys Bags Names Words

Engaged partner organizations at several conferences.

Online conference - brain trust with one of their partner organizations that led to screenings throughout the world.



CREATING EVENTS



SCARCITY PART 1:

CREATE TIME Scarcity

ONE NIGHT/LIMITED BOOKINGS

Creates urgency.

Easier to book.

You can make more money.



CREATING SCARCITY PART 2:

Unique Live Qualities Unavailable Anywhere Else

- Filmmaker Q&A
- Panel with Partners or Subjects or Influencers
- Live music
- The film is different every time it is played (ENO)
- Food - go to a separate location
- Make it a happening

Event/Theatrical: Keys Bags Names Words

Goal - Awareness - Change the world.

Not a festival Film

One Night Events
Community
Theatrical

120 Screenings 28 Countries
200+Screenings 30 Countries

Eventized with Partners and Panels



Event/Theatrical: Sam Now

Goal - Career

30+ Festivals - Multiple Awards

30+ City Theatrical

Some community screenings.

Weeklong Qualifying Run

Most single night events

Eventized with Panels and
Influencers



Event/Theatrical: Hundreds of Beavers

Goal: Money

55 Fests - Fantasia Fest - niche festivals.

Very eventized.

Theatrical - started around the great lakes then NY and national - still going. Grossed \$650,000 to date.



Event/Theatrical:

My Love Affair With Marriage

Goal: Audience in Theaters

110 Festivals

25 Awards

35+ city US theatrical release with a 5 month window - they didn't care about VOD

Theatrical releases in France and Latvia



DIGITAL RIGHTS



For Me Digital Right Encompass:

Broadcast/Cable/Satellite

TVOD/SVOD/AVOD/FAST

Airline/Hotel/Cruise Ship

*But still some of these rights are separated and some digital distribs
won't take all – need to be careful and protective.*



Consumer Experience: Convenience

Viewing How I Want, When I
Want, Where I Want, in the Way I Want



If this experience is driven by convenience – then you should consider making it convenient everywhere at the same time – **gave rise to day and date.**



Forms of VOD

TVOD: Transactional: Sales and Rentals - Where the Customer Pays to view the film: iTunes, Amazon, GooglePlay

PVOD: Premium VOD TVOD but at a higher price point or earlier window. Exciting emerging systems: Jolt, Kinema, Eventive, Gathr

SVOD: In which a Customer pays a monthly fee to watch a variety of content: Netflix, Hulu, Max etc. Many niche platforms.

AVOD: Ads are displayed before, during and after the content. Free to the customer. YouTube, Tubi, Pluto. Fastest growing.



FAST: Free Ad Supported Television

- Similar to AVOD in that ads are shown but the consumer has no choice as to what to watch - programming plays similar to linear television.
- There are hundreds if not thousands of channels now.
- Platforms: Roku, Samsung, LG (the TV maker wants to monetize the customer on their channels)



WAYS TO RELEASE - Digital Distributor

- Takes rights
- Gives a percentage after expenses
- Not many companies left
- Be careful and vet
- Term, territory, rights.
- Don't give rights they can't execute
- Have an out clause
- Some will promote - a bit. Some won't



International Sales

- Some - Not all films have international potential.
- So much local production now - harder to break through.

What Can Help for International:

- Genre - horror, action.
- Stars
- Unique Nothing Else Like It - My Love Affair with Marriage
- Universal - Keys Bags Names Words
- US box office - Hundreds of Beavers



International Sales

- International Sales Agent:
 - Sales are tough - take on only a few films.
 - Generally they take 25-40% after expenses.
 - Cap and limit expenses
- DIY
 - Can try to reach out on your own, go to markets.
 - Hire a consultant to help you.
- Discuss with your digital distributor.



Digital: Sam Now

Independent Lens
Broadcast/co-pro deal.

Day and Date TVOD through
an aggregator.

3 Months later SVOD -
Criterion



Digital: Hundreds of Beavers

Pre-sold SVOD & AVOD rights to Cineverse/Fandor. \$9K Advance.

TVOD Rights to Film Hub \$200K to date.

Making international sales based on the strength of the domestic box office.



Digital: My Love Affair With Marriage

Digital deal in the US because of the theatrical release.

Broadcast/Streaming: Italy, France, Spain, HBO Central Europe, Latvia



BUT

Digital monetization is increasingly tough -
leading filmmakers to longer event/theatrical
windows.



EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

A BLEND OF EVENTS AND DIGITAL
RIGHTS



EDUCATIONAL

Educational rights traditionally include two types of rights: non-theatrical performance rights and sales of purchases of the films/DVDs.

Distributors take from 50-75% of the revenue.

They usually want a 6-9 month window before Home Video

Might be worth it if educational is important.

There is now a mixing of DVD and VOD in Edu – creating some issues for Home VOD.



Educational: Sam Now

Signed with Educational
Distributor Good Docs

Ran Day and Date and with
VOD - after theatrical.



MERCHANDISE



Hundreds of Beavers: Merch



Hundreds of Beavers Merch: Buttons



Hundreds of Beavers Merch: Fan Created



TIMING YOUR RELEASE



WHAT FACTORS AFFECT THE TIMING OF YOUR RELEASE?

YOU MUST CONSIDER:

- PREMIERE DATE
- RELEASE PATTERN/WINDOWS



PREMIERE DATE



TIMING

Premiere Date Considerations

- Thematic Events
- Distribution Events



PREMIERE DATE

Thematic Events

- Is there a day, week, month that makes sense to the story of your film:

Earth Day

Native American History Month etc

- *Organizations and schools need programming for these times.*
- *Journalists need stories*



PREMIERE DATE

Distribution Event

SUCH AS

- Premiere Festival
- Broadcast date or SVOD or TVOD Date



RELEASE PATTERN

A.K.A.

WINDOWING



WHAT IS A RELEASE WINDOW

The amount of time one form of film right is permitted to monetize without competition from other film rights.

Coordinate Your Rights So That They Work in Concert to Achieve Your Goals



WINDOWING

COLLAPSED THEATRICAL

- From 2 Weeks to 1 Months before VOD/Broadcast.
- Take advantage of collapsed publicity and outreach



WINDOWING

+3 Month Event Theatrical

- Reasons:
 - Community theatrical more important than other modes of release
 - Change the world – you need that time to run the impact campaign
 - You want more time for educational –
 - You feel TVOD won't be nearly as beneficial as screenings/educational.

WINDOWING - Hundreds of Beavers

U.S. DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

	January			February			March			April			
Great Lakes Road Show Filmmakers in attendance, beavers wrestled			1/26/24 - Minneapolis to 2/10/24 - Toronto										
Wider Theatrical Release U.S. No eventized aspects, maybe virtual Q&As, playing wherever					Debut in NYC at IFC then LA at Laemmle Glendale then other theaters throughout USA								
TVOD Release via Filmhub Apple TV, amazon, Youtube Premium Rental + *exclusive merchandize launch on website*											One week exclusive window where film is available to rent on demand at premium prices, then it goes down to normal prices		
SVOD RELEASE Fandor											Fandor release		

RESOURCES



THE NEW 50/50



BUDGET FOR YOUR RELEASE



Hundreds of Beavers

\$20K to start
Road Show \$30K
Total Cost \$135K
Booking \$25K
Publicity \$30K
Paid Ads \$25K
Social Sweat
Equity -
\$150-\$250K



Your budget depends on what you are trying to accomplish - hard to do for less than 50K - not including conventional film festival promotion.

That is why it is important to strategize and budget before you start entering festivals so you plan your budget and make proper decisions about what is best for the film.



Landscape

1. The distribution model for independent film is broken.
2. You are competing with ALOT of other content.
3. Question any all rights deal you are presented with:
 - a. What is their track record - Talk to other filmmakers.
 - b. Exclude rights they cannot/do not sell.
 - c. Protect yourself.
4. Embrace a Split Rights/Hybrid Strategy
5. There is an audience - you need to find them.
6. There is a path for every film

Strategy

1. What is Your 1 Primary Goal
2. What is unique About Your Film - Test Your Film!
3. What stage are you at? How does that affect your Release?
4. Who is your audience? What are the core audiences?
5. How can you reach those audiences through: Shared, Owned, Earned and Paid Media
6. What film rights make sense for your film?
7. How will you window these film rights.
8. Resources: Budget and raise money for your release.

ab8ve

LET'S CONNECT!

Subscribe to my Substack

**For One on One Consultation/Campaign
Supervision/Theatrical Release**

8above.com

jonreiss.substack.com

What is the 8 Above 6-Month Distribution Lab?

<https://8above.com/distribution-lab/>



What is the 8 Above 6-Month Distribution Lab?

<https://8above.com/distribution-lab/>



- 1. Go through the process with others.**
- 2. Create a Dist/Mark Strategy**
- 3. 24 Cohort Meetings**
- 4. Group discussions**
- 5. Presentations by Jon & Experts**
- 6. Monthly 1:1 Private Consults with Jon**
- 7. Access to trove of online presentations and documents.**



If interested - sign up for an info session.

[Click here to sign up.](#)

