



In Focus: Take 12 bridges the digital gap

Sarah Cooper

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"The digital world is already having a huge impact on the film industry, and we will either adapt or fall by the wayside" - John Woodward, CEO of the UK Film Council. The challenges of digital transition has now entered the mainstream of the business but there are missing ingredients – notably a lack of convincing business models. That gap has now been taken on by NESTA and the UK Film Council.

Take 12 is a programme to encourage independent film companies to embrace new digital technology and use it to build new revenue streams. And we were keen to get involved. Over the next year *Screen* will be profiling and charting the progress of the 12 film businesses taking part in the programme, giving you the chance to keep up to date with the very latest thinking in digital technology – from viral marketing and search engine optimisation, to online distribution and revenue opportunities.

The programme is not just about the 12 businesses involved, it is for the whole of the film industry – a chance to see what works and what doesn't. "This is a live laboratory where we can all peer in and see the results", says Pete Buckingham, head of distribution at the UK Film Council.

The Programme

Take 12 was launched back in March 2008 by John Woodward and the then culture minister Margaret Hodge. "The timing was just right", says NESTA's Creative Economy programme director Jon Kingsbury.

"The BBC had launched iplayer which really raised the profile of digital distribution and video content, we noticed that more people were downloading, and piracy was becoming a bigger issue. So it was a case of what could NESTA and the UK Film Council do to get together to experiment with digital distribution, and crucially, encourage film companies to test new business models going forward".

The programme works by pairing up 12 film businesses, from across the value chain, with digital consultancy expert strategists (innovation partners), who will allocate approximately \$75,000 (£40,000) worth of their time to each participant. Each company will receive a specially tailored programme of financial/business planning support to help them identify and deliver opportunities for new forms of distribution. And hopefully bring in new revenues.

One of the innovation partners is HUGE entertainment, who helped to deliver the BBC iplayer. "Their background is a mix of strategic thinking and business planning. They know the digital landscape, and are able to understand about everything from content and coding to metatagging and marketing in the digital world", says Kingsbury.

The other partner is made up of an amalgamation of two companies – media consultancy, MTM London and digital content company Illumina Digital. 'MTM has a very strong background in research, and Illumina digital is a Bafta winning cross media production company who can deliver, so they will make a great team'. says Kingsbury.

The project really got under way in July with the first workshop acting as an opportunity for everyone to get together and talk through the outline. "Since then, the innovation partners have been meeting with each

business and drafting a plan of action, which the companies are in the process of working through to define a more solid strategic plan", says Kingsbury.

The programme runs until January 2010 and will involve three or four more workshops which will provide an opportunity to look at issues as and when they arise, and how they can be addressed going forward. All the film businesses are expected to sit down together and share their ideas. "There is no room for competitiveness between the participants. Part of the proviso is that they are completely up for it. And that means sharing ideas" says Kingsbury.

"The non innovative approach would be to have a one to one between film business and consultant. But we are trying to create a commonality of purpose, learning and experimentation, by running a series of workshops where all the film companies get together for the day and share what they have learnt" he adds.

Digital Pioneers

"Take 12 is not just about investing in companies, it is about conducting an experiment from which the film industry can learn from" – Pete Buckingham

So what if the experiment goes wrong?

"The thing about learning is that you can't go wrong. If certain ideas don't work out then we can all see why they haven't worked and try and adapt them so they will. We may find that we go down cul de sacs, but that in itself is a tremendously valuable learning curve", says Buckingham.

"Even the Hollywood studios don't have a clear path. We have chosen to run a project from the bottom up, because these small companies may just have the answers that everyone is looking for", points out Kingsbury. For example, one of the questions we are asking on the programme is how can word of mouth/community/social networking encourage the marketing and take up of cinema', says Kingsbury.

And how is the programme going so far? "What I have observed is just how energised the 12 businesses are" says Kingsbury. "Some of them came into the programme thinking they knew exactly what they wanted to do and all they needed was a bit of help, but thanks to the input of the innovation partners they are now looking at things in a completely different way", Kingsbury reveals. "The feed back we have had so far is 'oh my god, I never thought about that'".

These 12 businesses are "digital pioneers, bravely going where no independent companies have gone before", adds Buckingham. "And the rest of the film industry has the opportunity to learn from their successes and failures".

Transparency



"There is a very strong emphasis on sharing, this is not about commercial confidence" – Jon Kingsbury, NESTA.

In the spirit of transparency and fairness, creative industry consultancy Burns Owens Partnership has been brought on board as an 'evaluation partner' to make sure the process is working at every stage of the programme. "So often the evaluation is done at the end of the process when it is too late, so we made sure we had someone on board right from the beginning", says Kingsbury.

One of BOP's jobs is to make sure the relationship between NESTA and the Film Council is flourishing. And so far? "It's going really well, I think", laughs Jon Kingsbury. "This programme is also very well documented. We

just had our first board meeting and looked at everything. We want all the material out there for people to see", adds Kingsbury.

The Future

Take 12 may officially come to an end in January 2010, but if the programme achieves what it has set out to do, these 12 companies should be equipped with business models to help them weather further developments in digital technology. And if the rest of the film industry can't keep up? "The question will be, is there more to be learnt?". says Pete Buckingham. "If the answer is yes, then we would certainly consider running the programme again".

Read the first of Screen's profiles on December 1st

THE 12 FILM BUSINESSES

"Of the 50 entries we received, we purposefully selected a broad range of companies – from online distribution, to traditional sales and distribution, to archive and production companies - so that we would have the spectrum of what is representative of the film industry out there"- Pete Buckingham, Head of Distribution at the UK Film Council

The 12 film businesses taking part in the programme are:

- [B3 Media](#) (Marc Boothe's digital culture company with a track record of working with multicultural communities)
- [BreakThru Films](#) (UK production company that won an Oscar for animated Peter And The Wolf)
- [Film Export UK](#) (UK sales company umbrella group) -
- [Hollywood Classics](#) (sales company for theatrical rights to classic films)
- [Lux](#) (website devoted to UK film and video artists)
- [Metrodome Distribution](#) (independent distributor)
- [Mosaic Films](#) (groundbreaking documentary production outfit)
- [onedotzero](#) (cross-platform production and events company)
- [Revolver Entertainment](#) (independent distributor)
- [Vod Almighty](#) (streaming platform)
- [Warp Films](#) (Sheffield-based production company)
- Zini Limited (start-up working to supply third-party licensees with independent films)