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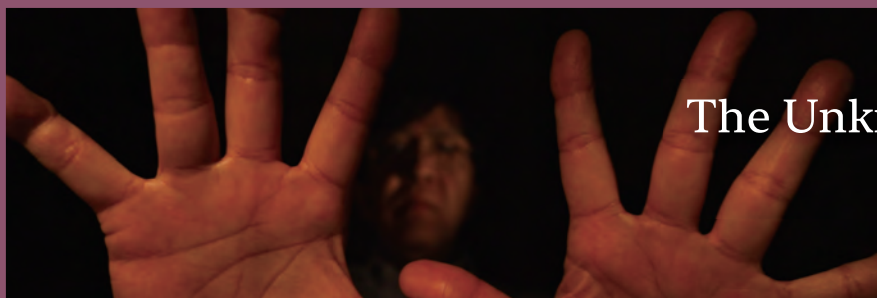


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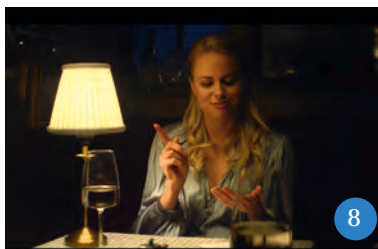


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Attention grabbers

From Barack Obama to Lupita Nyong'o and America's First Lady, A-list talent is becoming a 'must-have' addition for unscripted projects. Tim Dams explores the growing trend and its implications



If you want proof that the market for A-list presenting talent is red hot, consider the outstanding narrator category in this year's Emmy Awards.

Former US president Barack Obama added to his list of achievements last month by winning the category for Netflix documentary series *Our Great National Parks*.

He saw off a raft of rival talents to scoop the award, including natural history supremo Sir David Attenborough, Hollywood star Lupita Nyong'o, basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and US stand-up comedian W. Kamau Bell.

Our Great National Parks won an Emmy for its narrator – former US president Obama

Demand for such top presenting talent is higher than ever as broadcasters and streamers look for shows that can stand out at a time when viewers enjoy a surfeit of content choices. And nothing helps boost the profile of a documentary like the addition of a celebrity host or narrator.

'Huge name' appeal

The market for on-screen talent is "massive" right now, says Doug Mackay-Hope, SVP of development and production at Wildstar Films. "The sky is the limit in terms of getting huge names attached to documentaries."

Wildstar's Nat Geo/Disney+ series *America The Beautiful* is narrated by *Black Panther* actor and producer Michael B. Jordan, while *America's National Parks*, also for Nat Geo/Disney+, is narrated by country star Garth Brooks and features First Lady Dr Jill Biden in each episode as a guest narrator. "It's a great opportunity for them to show a different side of themselves and for us and the platform to attract an additional audience that might not naturally come to wildlife documentaries - it's a win-win all round," says Mackay-Hope.

For producers, it's vital to package a show so that it is "undeniable" when it is being pitched to commissioning executives, says Joe Weinstock, CEO of Rose Rock Entertainment, a joint venture with Argonon that was launched in May. "And part of that package always revolves around talent." Weinstock's career credits include hit A&E format *Duck Dynasty* as well as Disney+'s *Becoming* and *River Of No Return* for Discovery.

But attaching talent to shows comes with a host of challenges for producers.

Not surprisingly, they can add quite a significant cost to productions, increasing the pressure on financing, says Julie Meldal-Johnsen, EVP of global content at ITV Studios. "Where finance from various international partners and or distributors is needed, it can be a complicating factor as so many international buyers need to replace narrators with someone speaking in the local language and language barriers can negate the value talent can bring in the home country."

Cost efficiencies

There are ways to work around high talent fees, says Weinstock. Clever scheduling can reduce the number of days they might be needed on a shoot, cutting their required fees; or they might be brought on as an executive producer and take a share of the production fee itself.

Weinstock says talent is like a 'double edged sword' for projects. Yes, projects with talent attached are more likely to be greenlit – but getting the talent attached in the first place can be a challenging and complex process. Producers can only offer projects to "sophisticated talent" one at a time, rather than offering to multiple talents. "And when you go out to A-list talent, there are lots of people around these folks that take time to respond."

And then, after all the effort of attaching a talent, what happens if buyers are not that interested in them fronting a doc? So, it's important to have off the record chats first with commissioners to see what they think of particular talents.

Adding to the complexity, top talent won't really want to be part of a project unless it is greenlit. But you need to have had some kind of conversation with the talent first to get them attached in principle. Wildstar's Mackay-Hope says: "If you say it's with Tom Cruise, the first question any self-respecting commissioner is going to ask is: 'Is he on board?' No one wants to be that person that just says: 'No, Tom has no idea we are pitching this, but I am sure he'll love it...'. Those meetings tend to come to an end soon after!"

Tying in talent

Producers stress that it is crucial to attach the right talent to projects, and not just to go searching for a big name for the sake of it. "The idea has to be brilliant first and foremost and then the talent has to really add to it – be it from their own passions or personal experiences," says Mackay-Hope.

"The talent needs to be intimately involved in the show or have a passion for the subject matter," adds Weinstock. "You can't get away with vanity credits any longer. Viewers are smarter about this these days."

A good example of a talent being intimately involved with a subject is recent ITV commission *Vicky McClure: My Grandad's War*, which sees the *Trigger Point* and *Line Of Duty* star talk to her 97-year-old grandfather Ralph, a Royal Navy veteran who helped to invade France during the Normandy Landings. The one-off special is produced by North One and Build Your Own Films.

"It's a great opportunity for huge names to show a different side of themselves, while for us, and the platform, it attracts an additional audience"

Doug Mackay-Hope,
Wildstar Films



Having a topic that is of personal importance to the talent, such as *Vicky McClure: My Grandad's War*, is key



Channel 4's *Alan Carr's Adventures With Agatha Christie* uses the comedian's wit to engage viewers



“Language barriers can negate the value talent can bring in their home country”

Julie Meldal-Johnsen,
ITV Studios



“Having a subject that genuinely appeals to a passion the talent has – offering them a unique chance for a wonderful experience to shine a light on an issue they feel strongly about – is ideal,” says ITV Studios’ Meldal-Johnsen.

She says that hosts who can bring humour and wit are in demand. “Alan Carr with his charisma and liveliness is fantastic – he is the perfect companion to audiences in [Channel 4’s] *Alan Carr’s Adventures With Agatha Christie*.”

Meldal-Johnsen adds that narrators who have particular voices that audiences can recognise are also sought after. Stephen Fry is the onscreen host and narrator of ITV natural history series *A Year On Planet Earth* from Plimsoll Productions. “His warmth, compelling presence and instantly recognisable voice are a huge asset to the series.” Meldal-Johnsen also cites the “mellifluous voice” of Sophie Okonedo as being particularly in demand for natural history - she is narrating *Running With The Beast* from Atlantic Productions and Plimsoll Productions series *Mother Nature*.

Some shows demand a very particular kind of talent. Amsterdam-based distributor Lineup Industries handles the format *Taboo*, which sees a famous comedian take on subjects that society has judged too taboo to laugh about, be it blindness, obesity or other

physical disabilities. They source their material directly from those affected after spending five days living with them. The format has sold to broadcasters in territories like Australia, Belgium, Israel and Portugal.

The number one challenge of producing the series is finding the right comedian to host the show, says Lineup co-founder Julian Curtis. It requires the comedian to immerse themselves in other people’s lives, and to write a routine based on a highly challenging subject matter. “It’s a show, which I think would have sold more if the talent was much more easily or readily available.” If the presenter gets it right though, the reward for them can be great in terms of public profile and perception.

Looking ahead, there are questions about the future of talent-led documentaries. Is it a bubble that will peak? Will the cost-of-living crisis lead viewers to search for more relatable documentaries that reflect their own lives, rather than those presented by high profile names? Weinstock recalls that transactional series such as *Pawn Stars*, *Storage Wars* and *Cash In The Attic* resonated in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Whatever their future, it’s impossible to deny the current pulling power of the talent-led documentary. And there are very few that are predicting its demise anytime soon. **TBI**

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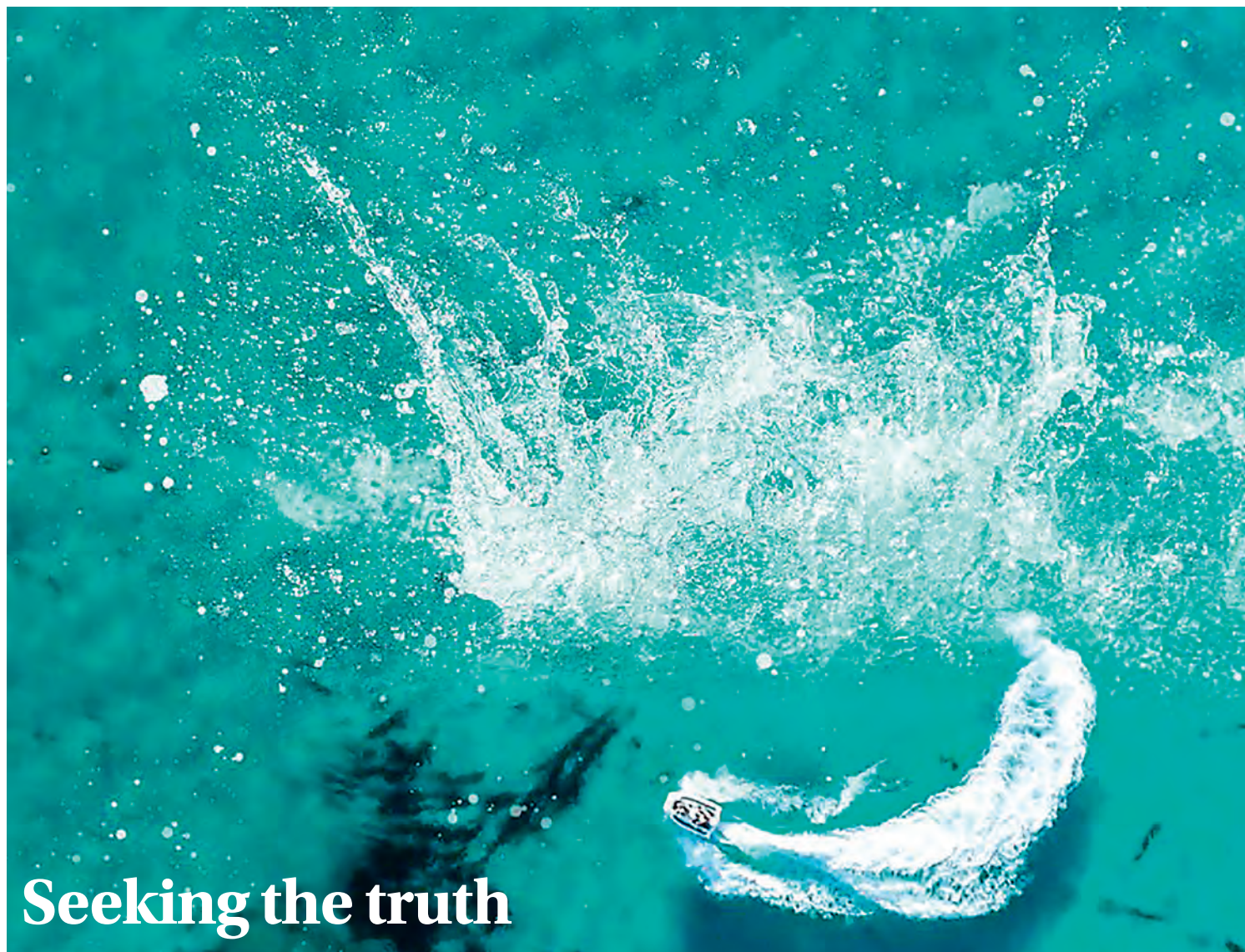


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Seeking the truth

True crime's soaring popularity means cutting through is harder than ever. Tim Dams explores if lines are being crossed

Few genres have proliferated like true crime over recent years, with the carousels of streaming platforms sprawling with titles like *Night Stalker: The Hunt For A Serial Killer*, *My Daughter's Killer* and *The Tinder Swindler*.

But as demand for true crime continues to grow and as producers look to cut through the mushrooming genre, are lines being crossed?

A background sense of disquiet has always accompanied such shows. In some corners of the industry, there is talk of a perfect storm of high demand for the genre, tightening budgets and a lack of experienced programme makers to tackle docs that have complex duty-of-care needs.

BBC's *High: Confessions Of An Ibiza Drug Mule* hails from Blast Films, whose Graeme McAulay cautions against harassing victims families

Cut & rush

Graeme McAulay, creative director at Blast Films, has worked on a range of acclaimed crime series throughout his career, including *24 Hours In Police Custody* and *Life On Death Row*. Recently, Blast has produced Channel 4 series *Murder in the Alps* and the BBC's *High: Confessions Of An Ibiza Drug Mule*.

McAulay says there are a finite number of major crime stories from the past 20 years worthy of a TV series but there is a "rush" to tell them.

"What everyone has to remember is that the families and loved ones involved in these stories are getting called and contacted relentlessly. If you are a family



connected to a case with a really high public profile, then you are probably going to be fielding a lot of calls. And that can't be very nice."

McAulay has spent many years covering crime, initially as a broadcast journalist. "The first thing you need to have is a journalistic approach to it, rather than an entertainment or TV approach. That's where your ethics and principles need to begin from."

He stresses that Blast is only interested in stories if there is something new to say or a genuine reason to tell the story again, and if the key people involved want to tell their story.

For *Murder In The Alps* - about the unsolved killing ten years ago of a British family in the French Alps - Blast had access to the brother of one of the victims who himself had been a prime suspect in the case.

McAulay says the doc is about an unsolved murder



Murder In The Alps tackles the human impact of the theories surrounding a family's murder a decade ago

and a brother who wants to tell his side of the story. "That's an example of a documentary that is really worth making - the question we were asking is not, 'who killed this family?' but, "why has this not been solved yet?"

He also believes there is another layer to the documentary that makes it about more than true crime - and that is about the human impact of the conspiracy theories surrounding the killings. "We wanted to give viewers the experience of following these conspiracy theories and being seduced by them, so we can understand the seductive nature of them and reflect on the human cost of them."

Protocol & production

Other producers echo this point, saying that it is often important for a true crime doc to be about more than the specifics of a crime itself.

BriteSpark Films, part of Argonon, for example, has two recent true crime series on its slate: Channel 4's recently aired documentary *Porn King: The Rise And Fall Of Ron Jeremy*, about the adult film actor accused of more than 30 counts of sexual assault involving 21 women and girls across more than two decades; and an upcoming Investigation Discovery series provisionally titled *Wild West*, about homicide investigations in small communities in the contemporary west of America.

Nick Godwin, creative director and co-founder of BriteSpark Films, says the two-part *Porn King* series "asks the central question: 'Is it conceivable for a male porn star to rape a female porn star?' Of course we know the answer to that, but before the MeToo movement, the victims would not have gone to the

police because it is unlikely they would have done anything. No one really cared.”

The documentary, he explains, “is about a bigger cultural moment in terms of story than the arrest and charging of one man.”

In the UK, true crime production must adhere to guidelines from regulator Ofcom, which says that programme-makers and broadcasters should always carefully consider the likely impact on those involved, such as victims or their close relatives.

Ofcom, for example, says those whose experience is to feature in a true crime show, or their close family, should normally be informed of the plans to make a programme.

That said, there are no industry agreed rules for making true crime documentaries. Sometimes producers will approach victims before they have a commission to see if they would like to participate or to tell their side of the story. In such cases, a producer should inform potential contributors that the documentary has not been commissioned yet.

Other times, producers will approach people after they have secured a commission or development funding from a broadcaster.

Securing participation often comes down to the skill of individual APs or researchers - some are better than others at striking up a rapport. Often approaches are made through intermediaries, perhaps a friend of the family, a journalist who knows them well or via police contact. “If victims are reluctant to talk, we won’t push it. That just wouldn’t be right,” says Godwin. “But you’d be surprised at how often people do want to talk.”

Similarly, producers may or may not choose to screen a completed documentary to participants beforehand. Some will not do so unless there is specific agreement in place beforehand; others will allow it to ensure the contributor is happy.

Experience counts

In most cases, broadcasters and streamers like to work with experienced producers on true crime shows.

That’s because making true crime TV is arguably more challenging than any other factual genre. “If you are considering as a company getting into true crime, good luck - it is a compliance and litigation nightmare,” says one producer.

For example, in the UK and the US, a victim of sexual violence is entitled to anonymity, so it is important to be sure that you have their written approval to waive this if they choose to take part.

Says Godwin: “We won’t do a very low budget crime series – given the level of research and legal



The Tinder Swindler became a global hit for Netflix

“If you are a family connected to a case with a really high public profile, then you are probably going to be fielding a lot of calls – that can’t be very nice”

Graeme McAulay,
Blast Films



responsibility, it is just not worth it.”

The bar has been raised in true crime documentary production too. Just as drama has become more sophisticated in recent years, moving from relatively straightforward procedurals like *CSI* to the multi-layered, nuanced narratives of *Breaking Bad*, so too has high-end true crime TV.

The complexity of making true crime docs hasn’t dimmed broadcaster and streamer appetite for the genre. Godwin says there is nothing new about this – but that demand has spiked because there are now more outlets looking for true crime, from streamers through to podcasters. “People have always told crime stories since time immemorial,” he says.

McAulay adds that the genre is popular because it’s about “stories at the extremities of human experience.”

However, many factual commissioners are deluged with ideas for true crime docs – and they will often ask producers to bring documentary ideas that are not in the true crime space.

That said, most are looking for “stranger than fiction stories” (and true crime fits this bill very well) or a fresh take on a very well-known crime.

Amid this demand, McAulay stresses how important it is for programme makers to be mindful of the human impact of what they are doing and to engage viewers with the different people involved in the story on a deep and human level.

“If that’s what your rationale is and that’s your approach is from the beginning, and you are doing it in a way which is open and where you’re bringing the people whose stories you’re telling along with you from the outset, then that’s the right way to do it. That’s when you feel like you’re doing the right thing.” **TBI**

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Whole new worlds



Virtual worlds have been talked about for decades but to many, it's still unclear what the metaverse is. Richard Middleton explores and finds a universe of content opportunities

Call it what you will, but the potential provided by virtual worlds are endless for those involved in creating content. The metaverse seems to open up myriad potential to tell stories in new ways, yet it also generates pushback and furrowed eyebrows - not least because just what the metaverse is or will be seems unclear.

Perhaps that's why Vicki Dobbs Beck, VP of immersive content at Disney-owned Lucasfilm & ILMxLAB, doesn't use the term too much.

"It's next-generation storytelling, connected across

platforms," she says, speaking at RTS London. For Dobbs Beck, the approach to creating content for virtual worlds is more focused on "a holistic creative vision", with the goal being that if you can offer various experiences via the world then "the whole starts to become greater than its parts".

Brand experimentation

There has already been considerable experimentation with pushing brands traditionally associated with TV into these virtual worlds. Online

Seed, a virtual game world created by Klang Games

video game *Fortnite* recently hosted a new world around BBC Studios-owned *Doctor Who*, with the world allowing players to take on new adventures, missions and battles while exploring iconic locations from the ‘Whoniverse’. But the game also provided the setting for the *Doctor Who* Museum, an interactive world where players can find out more about the show.

For Jatin Aythora, director of research & development at the BBC, the word ‘metaverse’ describes the way in which “we are going to be operating on internet platforms with multiple interactions.”

“We’ve been following this trend for some time - back in 2004 we were experimenting with digital twins [virtual recreations of physical systems] and looking at how a digital world might look.”

Fast-forward almost two decades and the imagined potential is now becoming possible, he says. “It gives us the opportunity to explore how we can engage with viewers and expand our public service offering. And we also want to make sure we remain relevant within that public service offering, that will matter a lot.”

Mundi Vondi, CEO & co-founder at Berlin-based Klang Games, agrees that the term ‘metaverse’ can “be very divisive”. It is instead, he says, about the technology that “enables us to connect thousands if not millions of people across the universe... it’s basically a gaming space and evolution of that.”

And within these worlds, there appear to be huge opportunities for both content creators and rights holders.

Warner Bros. partnered with *Fortnite* in 2020 to offer ‘movie nights’, enabling players to watch Christopher Nolan films such as *Inception*, and the BBC’s Aythora says there is great potential to put other content into these virtual environments.

They also, however, provide canvasses for storytelling like never before, and across genres.

“You have to be willing to experiment, it’s like being at the start of the TV or film industries,” says Dobbs Beck. “It’s a new version of storytelling.”

She says there are three themes that link what Lucasfilm is doing in the space: storytelling; immersive technologies and “mixed reality so you can step inside our stories in new and different ways”; and the potential of creating communities.

“It’s also about finding that balance – one of the things we think about is balancing the curated story with participating in that world in a way that preserves the integrity of the world but also provides meaningful ways to engage.”

“These worlds give us the opportunity to explore how we can engage with viewers and expand our public service offering”

Jatin Aythora,
BBC



Educational engagement

For unscripted producers, the potential is immense. As BBC Studios has shown with its *Doctor Who* Museum, there is the potential to create virtual destinations that can provide entirely new experiences for fans.

And there are also expectations that these virtual worlds will start to focus on user generated content (UGC). “The evolution of the metaverse is very much centred around the toolset you provide the user with, so they can create experiences for each other - that’s where you see immersive experiences,” continues Vondi.

His company is behind Seed, a virtual world that aims to provide “engaging media experiences” to users, while also creating online communities.

For many, interacting in such virtual worlds can seem removed, but for younger generations, digital goods have as much value as their physical counterparts.

“It’s abstract for me, but not for them,” says Dobbs Beck. “And they want to have a role in the worlds and engage directly with the content – that’s really important to consider looking 5, 10, 15 years from now.”

For Vondi, there will be no lightning moment when the world flips to engaging in virtual environments, just as there was no overnight shift to other technological shifts such as streaming. “It’s a continuous evolution, it won’t come as a shock to anyone. A lot of the talk is, ‘it’s coming, don’t miss it’, but I think it will seep in over time. More and more of your purchases will become virtual and before you know it, you’ll be spending more on virtual goods than physical goods.”

For the BBC, such virtual worlds are another technology through which they will likely need to participate in to remain relevant. And as Aythora points out, the tech’s maturity provides an additional place for the pubcaster to “inject public value and introduce educational and news content”.

“I don’t think we’re late, we’re observing. It depends on if you want to be an interactive content provider or not.”

“The Walt Disney Company sees this as a very significant opportunity,” adds Dobbs Beck. “And we are trying to understand what it means for the company. For us, we are trying to transcend physical, digital and virtual worlds... Our version of the metaverse may be different to others. And that is something that people are really trying to explore now.” **TBI**

Factual Hot Picks



Top
Pick

Our selection of the hottest and most fascinating factual programming heading to market in Cannes

Con Girl

Producer: CJZ

Distributor: Bossanova

Broadcaster: Network Seven (Australia) & Paramount+ (UK & Ireland)

Logline: Docuseries digging into the crimes of Australian con artist Samantha Azzopardi, featuring exclusive interviews with her victims

This 4 x 60-minute documentary series tells the stranger-than-fiction story of con artist Samantha Azzopardi, who has amassed at least 70 false identities since she embarked upon her career of deception as a 14-year-old girl from Brisbane.

On the surface, Azzopardi seemed innocence personified, but behind the sweet facade was a brazen and sophisticated confidence trickster - and a psychological enigma.

Producers CJZ dig deeper than ever before into Azzopardi's crimes and the impact on those she has left in her wake.

"*Con Girl* is the result of a complex two-year investigation by the CJZ team that has uncovered a series of world exclusives on a case which continues to attract global media interest," reveals Andrew Farrell, head of factual at show producers CJZ.

"We were able to find and interview a number of key survivors of Samantha Azzopardi's cons. Some have never been publicly named before, none have ever told their stories in this much detail. What they reveal is often shocking, giving us extraordinary insights into the astonishing activities

that Samantha convinced them to undertake."

Farrell explains that the series also seeks to analyse why Azzopardi committed her crimes. "In a world first, we gather all the witness accounts and evidence from a string of her cons into one place and give it to leading forensic psychologist, Professor Richard Frierson, for analysis.

"Across the series he leads us on a fascinating journey through Samantha's psychology as we seek to understand what drove her on one of the most unusual crime sprees in history."

While Azzopardi started out in Australia, her story is global and one that will undoubtedly appeal to international audiences, says Farrell. "Her cons took her across the world. This series covers events in Ireland, Canada and Australia.

"We interview survivors from France, Australia and California. We speak to experts in London, New York City and South Carolina.

"The success of multiple recent unscripted and scripted series about cons has shown there is a universal fascination for these kinds of stories that transcends borders."



Mother Nature

Producer: Plimsoll Productions

Distributor: ITV Studios

Broadcaster: The Roku Channel

Logline: An immersive and intimate portrait of the lives of animal mothers big and small, around the world

From a cheetah with six hungry newborn cubs, to a tiny poison dart frog who has to piggyback her babies to safety, this 2 x 60-minute natural history series is focused on the lives of animal mothers of all shapes and sizes.

“*Mother Nature* explores motherhood through some of our best loved animals as well as some more unusual ones,” says series producer Seb Illis. “The challenges these incredible animal mothers face are familiar to us all – putting food on the table, standing up to a bully, protecting vulnerable babies, self-sacrifice – even if the circumstances are somewhat different.”

The show is “more than just

a celebration of the matriarch,” say Illis, who describes it as a “visual feast.”

“Filmed in some of the most beautiful locations in the world, using the latest camera technology, it is a chance to marvel at the natural world through the eyes of our best loved animals. In short, it’s perfect viewing for the whole family.”

Highlighting some of the animal families featured on the show, Illis shares that among his personal standouts are the cheetah and the Thomson’s gazelle.

“It’s very unusual for a cheetah mother to have six cubs reach six weeks, the age



they were when we started to film them. At that age they are incredibly vulnerable to any number of predators, but also their demands for food are huge.

“It meant the cheetah mother needed to hunt regularly as well as keep track of her young family.”

Meanwhile, Thomson’s

gazelle babies have a desperately low chance of survival, he reveals. “They are an easy meal to any number of the predators in the Masai Mara, but the mothers are extremely protective. We filmed an extraordinary sequence of a gazelle mother fending off a hungry jackal.”

My Name Is Reeva: I Was Murdered By Oscar Pistorius

Producer: WB Productions, in partnership with Cactus Tree Entertainment & Bloodrose Productions

Distributor: Keshet International

Broadcaster: Mnet (South Africa)

Logline: Docuseries with exclusive access to Reeva Steenkamp’s parents as they confront Oscar Pistorius as part of his parole process

It’s been almost a decade since Paralympian Oscar Pistorius was convicted of the murder of Reeva Steenkamp. Now, her parents must come to terms with their devastating loss once again as they confront Pistorius through South Africa’s Victim Offender Dialogue process, a condition of his early parole.

This 3 x 45-minute series offers exclusive access to their journey, while experts, state attorneys, investigating officers, and Reeva’s friends and family speak publicly for the first time

about these events and share new evidence and theories that were never presented in court.

“Because this docuseries is fully endorsed by Reeva’s parents, it is very much an unflinching reclamation and celebration of their daughter, as the bright, beautiful, and gentle soul she was before she became known to the world as a murder victim,” says Fleur Wheatley, VP of sales at Keshet International.

“Her optimism and love touched so many people during her short life and Barry and

June’s loss is clearly still so raw for them. For true crime fans, unprecedented access to the key people linked to these tragic events – investigators, lawyers, experts, journalists, friends and family of Reeva – offers a fresh perspective on a murder case that made headlines around the globe, presenting new evidence

and theories about what actually happened that fateful Valentine’s Day night nearly 10 years ago.”

The doc, however, is far more than a re-examination of the case, it is an emotional journey exploring the impact of Reeva’s loss on her parents and how they must once more face the man that killed their daughter.



Kaepernick & America

Producer: Triple Threat TV

Distributor: Espresso Media International

Broadcaster: N/A

Logline: One-off documentary exploring the aftermath and cultural impact of Colin Kaepernick's decision to take the knee in protest of police brutality and racial inequality in the US

Available in an 88-minute or 52-minute format, this one-off documentary explores the aftermath of US quarterback Colin Kaepernick's 2016 decision to take the knee during the national anthem at the start of NFL games, in protest at police brutality and racial inequality.

His act caused an earthquake in the race debate in the US and beyond, and this film examines both the man and his protest, and the remarkable conflict stirred by his symbolic gesture.

"Kaepernick's protest was an American exercise of free speech portrayed vehemently by his opponents as un-American

or unpatriotic," explains Gary Cohen, executive producer at Triple Threat TV. "The murder of George Floyd re-calibrated the larger public's perception of Kaepernick into a visionary whose bravery and heart compelled him to stand up to a system that has grown unwilling to confront its detractors."

Cohen says that the film explores how Kaepernick's protest helped to shape that larger narrative. "*Kaepernick & America* provides a review of a remarkable moment in American life – the rise of Trumpism and the growing divide amongst its people.

"As the country polarised,

Kaepernick's simple image, a Black man on a knee, became a lightning rod for both sides. Trump used Kaepernick as a symbol of the ungrateful, unpatriotic left, while supporters rallied around his bravery in calling attention to societal issues. It's only now that we can see this issue as the canary in the coal mine of the divide that defines America today."

It's a symbol that reverberated around the world and is "an

issue that remains high on news agendas", adding to its international appeal, says Georgia Walters, marketing & acquisitions executive at Espresso Media International.

"His 'taking the knee' has resonated in sports stadiums around the world, especially within international football where players have taken the knee prior to the start of a game as a symbolic gesture against racism," she adds.



Send Nudes: Body SOS

Producer: Crackit Productions (UK)

Distributor: Passion Distribution

Broadcaster: E4 (UK)

Logline: Relatable series about people with body hangups who get the chance to see what they would look like after cosmetic surgery

This transformational series (also available as a format) offers people with 'body hang-ups' the chance to look into the possible future, via 3D animated avatars, to show them an ideal of what they could look like if they went ahead with cosmetic surgery.

A presenter in the studio and a diverse panel will receive the individual's 'nudes' and add their feedback as the contributor looks to make a big decision.

"We all have issues with our bodies and *Send Nudes: Body SOS* does two important things," says Crackit founder

Elaine Hackett. "Firstly, it gives our contributors an idea of what their bodies would be like if they had surgery to change their shape. Secondly, and more importantly, it gives honest reactions to their body as it is now and post any changes."

"*Send Nudes* takes the TV makeover into the future by combining eye-popping 3D modelling technology with a warm, body positive tone. It's the ultimate cosmetic surgery try before you buy," adds Nick Tanner, Passion's director of sales & co-productions.





Opinion Siobhan Crawford

Sugary treats

TBI's resident format expert casts her eye over the offerings being launched at MIPCOM this year

MIPCOM sounds like it will be a rave. But a rave with very few edibles: don't panic... but we are content-light people!

From that 'paid for advertising' news that is circling, to all the press releases, we are seeing limited new launches. Does that mean people are saving the launches for when they're in Cannes? Securing content is a down-to-the-wire activity and our dear distributors are hard at it!

Rather than say 'hot picks', let's see if we can do a bit of a format topline round-up from what we know at the end of September.

- **Be-Entertainment** – *Finder\$ Keeper\$*. OK, if you are a broadcaster, pick up your phones and call Gepke. If you are a producer sit on your hands and wait. This one is good.

- **Rabbit** – *Wedding Diaries*. The new daily stripped diary format coming from Finland - consider the possibilities with a great cast and big moments following the wedding to extend the series.

- **Phileas** – *Instant Millionaire*. A scripted/unscripted hybrid that delves behind the curtain of a gameshow (that is really being played). Curiosity has me wanting to take a peak.

- **Lineup** – Two launches this market. *In Other News Today*. quizzing celebrities on the news has never been so fun, with viewers winning prizes from the comfort of their sofas.

- **Storylab** – Launching three new formats this market. *The Alcohol Experiment* has the best potential due to the demand for social experiment with soft formatting.

- **Media Ranch** – *The Story Of* continues to be big, plus *The Things My Dad Failed To Teach Me* will also be making waves this market. Call Tanja as big news is floating.

- **D360** – You have to love Canadians - they just get formatted content. *A Cut Above* is the only chainsaw competition you need in your life. High stakes.

- **Newen** – Two titles, plus existing pushes. Close in on *The Bodyguard* as it is unique insight into an industry that we don't see often; a really refreshing approach.

- **BNNVARA** – *Take Me Home* on NPO3 is a 'finding our roots' series, asking people to make the journey to ancestral homes and then asking the big questions but with solid ratings.

- **And the rest:** Acun Medya - we know a dating format is coming our way; Magnify is finalising titles, but will be pushing *Master Cleaners* and *Love Raft* from MIPTV.

And the groups?

All3Media's IDTV may have played the best game announcing the successor to *The Traitors* with no details at all - and *The Unknown* is just that. It will also drive people wild by remaining that way till market. Banijay is asking us to take a hike... *The Summit* is formatted with known game mechanics.

Nippon TV is asking us to drink a *Time Potion* – my experience of drinking is that it makes you forget time, but OK.

Red Arrow Studios is launching *Love For The Ages*, which asks troubled couples to separate and date younger people. Armoza is doing what can only be compared to *Sex Tape*, but for parenting, in *Parents Unfiltered*; Fremantle is challenging their casting department with *Unbreakable*; and Passion is asking us to *Send Nudes*. Optional I guess.

There is more, there is always more, but these are the headlines now. Though I urge you - consider the originality of the content. Also, look around and ask if a format is an investment or a quick burn? I was looking at the K7 MIPCOM 2021 trends recently and there must have been 50 titles. One year later, only nine formats are still active internationally. The idea that content is so disposable really makes me wonder - are we just launching content so we have something to say every six months? There is snobbery about bringing 'old' content back to market, but actually would it not be better to have something stable rather than quick burns? Distributors need to do this more than ever to avoid catalogue bloat.

MIPTV and MIPCOM are essential markets, not for content but for the relationships that give you advantageous access to content. So, foster those relationships hard at Brown Sugar! **TBI**

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

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Going up

Amazon Prime Video and Netflix have both enjoyed huge recent success with unscripted formats in France. Marie-Agnès Bruneau reports on what's next and where opportunities lie

Nouvelle École has performed well for Netflix, partly due to France's deep hip-hop roots

France's format market is in flux as growing demand from local broadcasters and streamers fuels a new wave of unscripted programming across the country.

Both Amazon and Netflix have enjoyed recent success with format adaptations this spring, when the second season of comedy gameshow *LOL*

became one of Prime Video's most-watched series across all genres and origins.

Not to be outdone, Netflix had hip-hop talent competition *Nouvelle École*, or *Rhythm + Flow France*, which remained in its Top Ten in France for five weeks in a row. Both, of course, were then also renewed.

Cultural resonance

Part of the reason for *Nouvelle École*'s success lies in hip-hop's deep roots in France and as Lucy Leveugle, Netflix's director for creative strategy in EMEA, tells TBI, the show offered "an authentic story" that was "really relevant to [French] culture."

French production company Black Dynamite, known more for its documentaries than its format adaptations, was chosen because of its connection to the hip-hop community and Leveugle says the result was "a reinvention" of the original US show that debuted in 2019.

It was, she adds, a series that developed its own personality, with new sets and backgrounds compared to the US version. "It's an interpretation rather than an adaptation, so you get a local feel," Leveugle explains, adding that it was introduced over three weeks rather than made available for bingeing all at once. "We do that sometimes – it's a conversational show and we felt it was really important to build on that conversation."

Leveugle says *Nouvelle École* is "part of a bigger regional strategy for non-fiction", with more originals and adaptations in the works. "Subscribers, perhaps, are more used to documentaries, and we'll do some more as well as more format and docusoaps, which can be really impactful."

For Thomas Dubois, who heads Prime Video original production in France, the "great thing" about *LOL* was that its audience grew in the second season. "It became one of our greatest successes in terms of engagement," he says.

Born as *Documental* in Japan, the Prime Video format was first adapted in Mexico, "then with our Italian, German and Spanish colleagues, we thought why not try adapt it ourselves," Dubois tells TBI.

"Humour is something very domestic – we don't all laugh in the same way at the same type of things," he continues. The French version has a different length and includes its own format arcs, while much attention was put into the diversified casting of celebrities.

And although it is fast to shoot, with just one location, and based on one simple rule – to get the other person to laugh – Dubois says "it actually required quite a lot of work upfront, with the talents developing their sketches with the help of writers."

Format hunting

Prime Video also renewed *Celebrity Hunted*, which had already been adapted in Italy, and which will develop more of a humorous tone in season two. "Another innovative format we are launching is *Cosmic Love* – astrology became a very popular topic

during the lockdown," he says.

Adapted from the US dating format, the French version will have more episodes and a host, reality star Nabilla, who already had her own docu-soap on Prime Video. The range underlines Amazon's broad demands. "What matters is the idea and concept. We'd love to find the next *LOL*: a simple pitch, well-known faces, in a surprising situation," he says.

For producers, such as Jean-Louis Blot, president of Banijay's Endemol France and the company that produced *LOL* and *Celebrity Hunted* for Prime Video, the two shows are "a strong signal" of how quickly streamers have acquired the know-how in adapting international formats.

There may also be new opportunities from broadcasters via their own streamers, which are starting to dedicate some budget to production. Leading is France.TV, which just had a hit with a local adaptation of *Drag Race*, a third-party format to which Endemol France had picked up the rights.

France Télévisions has already been producing streamer-first dramas to attract younger audiences and Blot says investment has also come in unscripted, notably with *Drag Race*. "They understood the potential and invested so we could produce a quality show, which became a marker on a society matter," he continues. The show was broadcast on France 2 in a late-night slot following its online success and will gain a better strand for the second season.

Replicating global trends, the major terrestrial

"Is primetime getting more fragmented or perhaps primetime shows are getting more targeted? Mainstream is still capable of driving big numbers"

Jean-Louis Blot,
EndemolShine France



Drag Race has enjoyed online popularity for France Télévisions



broadcasters have also been reviving well-known brands as the market becomes ever-more competitive with fragmenting primetime viewing. “Is it that it’s fragmented or perhaps primetime shows are getting more targeted?,” asks Blot. “Mainstream is still capable of driving big numbers.”

However, the recent re-launch of *MasterChef* met disappointing linear audience figures on France 2. Blot says that as the show was targeting younger viewers, the older audience moved away. Reflecting this, the show saw ratings rise considerably on catch-up.

One of Endemol France’s upcoming launches is the reboot of TF1’s former hit reality talent show *Star Academy*. “This format is perfectly suited to modern usages in its narrative and form, with its live feed, its daily show and its primetime and second part of the evening shows,” says Blot, underlining that reality works well on-demand. “It’s perfect for MyTF1 Max.”

Another reason why format franchises are being revived is because unscripted fare is gaining new linear primetime strands at the terrestrials. TF1, for instance, is scheduling shows on Tuesdays, with *Kob Lanta* and *Masked Singer*, while M6 is introducing additional unscripted strands to replace audience-dropping US series, which have no strand on the channel this fall.

“We’re coming off the back of more than a decade of US series supremacy,” says Blot. “Now they are disappearing from primetime and being replaced by unscripted, which is cost effective. There is much



Les Traîtres was a summer success for Studio 89

demand, although broadcasters remain somewhat risk-averse and because nothing happened in unscripted for 10 years, there’s a shortage of talent.”

Talking of risk-taking, M6 subsidiary Studio 89 enjoyed summer success with *Les Traîtres* (*The Traitors*), adapted from Dutch format *De Verraders*. It led at launch and “also reached a 38% share among women under 50, a record for a new show since the channel was launched,” says Florence Duhayot, MD of Studio 89.

“It’s a very disruptive psychological game and it required great courage to do it. Its look, its narrative were completely different,” she says. Here too, much attention was put on casting, including celebrities of various ages. She is now looking for formats “that can bring audiences together, explore new grounds and create an event.”

Studio 89 also found success this summer with original creation, *Qui Peut Nous Battre?* (*Who Can Beat Us?*), marking its “best launch for an original show in two years,” Duhayot says. The show was developed by Studio 89 after it teamed with RTL Group’s development structure, LC Group (Matthias Scholten) and produced together with indie French TV.

Studio 89’s *Top Chef* and *Mariés Au Premier Regard* (*Married At First Sight*) continue to perform, and Duhayot says that despite the influx of streamers, the strategy remains the same.

“Yes, there are more outlets but our job is still the same – to get millions watching us. When you see that *De Verraders* is going to be adapted by HBO Max in Spain, that *The Mole*, that we adapted in the past, was acquired by Netflix and that *Dancing With The Stars* is moving from ABC to Disney+, it shows we all look for extremely impactful shows that break new ground. And then from there, we need to produce it well.” **TBI**

Netflix’s EMEA wishlist

“We are looking for shows in three categories: formats/unscripted; docu-soaps/reality; and docuseries,” says Lucy Leveugle (left), who joined Netflix from Channel 4 in the UK four years ago to develop non-fiction in the EMEA region, together with local teams. She was recently elevated to director of creative strategy for EMEA.

In docu-soaps, the cast must “really stand out” and in docuseries the focus is on stories people know. She gives as examples South African docuseries *Senzo: Murder Of A Soccer Star* and Norway’s *Mister Good, Cop Or Crook?* “Everyone, there, knows these stories.”

As for unscripted and reality, beside *Nouvelle École* in France, recent hits have included *Young, Famous And African*, which has reached the streamer’s Top 10 in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria over four consecutive weeks. Also renewed were Spanish docu-soap *I Am Georgina* and reality series *Love Never Lies*, “an interesting local format that we are considering adapting in other countries,” she says.

Although Netflix is interested in developing formats, there is no systematic strategy because to be adapted, a format has to be relevant in the country, she points out. The streamer also, of course, likes to retain IPs but has developed a model that sees creators getting a fee each time the IP is remade. It is “an already proven business model,” she says, used for instance with *Too Hot To Handle*. And risk remains of interest, although Leveugle adds that *Too Hot To Handle* is already “quite edgy”. She adds: “Bold does not have to mean shocking – it can be exciting, new, moving a genre forward.”



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Paper format creators you need to know

Format expert Siobhan Crawford takes a look at some of the best minds in the business and identifies an array of creators who you really need to add to your contacts book

Let's talk about paper. Unscripted formats are in essence long-term games with no short-term rewards and a low success rate - but we do it, as one creative told me, because we are fascinated with new things and possibilities.

The world is global and that odd, obvious statement is poignant: content travelling and people pitching paper from country to country in their networks, purely for the love of their content and new things. The pandemic has ravaged many independent creators' stability and ability to sell, especially those that do not have the financial safety net of a group and which are undeterred by the conscious bias of the broadcasters that want group content 'safety' instead of the unknown.

With that in mind, can we pay it forward and help creatives get their content out into the world in a more immediate way, where for once they are not the hunters but the hunted?

16 Ukers Helvete hails from Nordic producers Nexiko

In an industry where content grabbing is relentless, why not grab the new?

The following are independents, whose current drive is developing paper formats for export to the international market. Almost all are unaffiliated. Does that mean you can swoop in with a \$20,000 advance and some 30+5 BS? No, it does not.

Oldies but goodies

The concern in writing this is that you'll have heard some of these names before. But hey, if you don't speak to them then here's a reminder that you should.

- **Dreamspark** – the one and only Moe Bennani is now an independent. The ex-Talpa creative has made his first hire and the slate is growing.
- **Phileas** – Sergio Sancho, understated but incredibly hard working, generating three to four new paper

formats each market. Most successful in Spanish speaking markets to date, many of you will be scheduling pre-MIPs with this man.

- **Free Kings** – Full disclosure, I'm now working with the ex-Blazhowski Belgium duo Muriel and Geert, who have been focused on the food space with the success of *Bake Off*. But they also have an expanding portfolio of paper formats that are well worth a look.

Single & ready to mingle

Here are the names of a few solo/duo creators of unscripted content you should get to know. Have a good rifle through for the gems:

- **Chris Lowden** – Chris has multiple active projects with international partners, he is using his personal connections to find homes. So far most of his deals are outside of Europe.
- **Angell Brothers** – Tom and Miles are dedicated creatives who also work in the branded content space. Their last two formats were with Magnify Media. Their name will pop up as more of us internationals befriend them.
- **Kirsten Jan van Nieuwenhuijzen** – Kirsten Jan is one half of the team behind Keshet dating format *Singletown* and he has now co-developed *The Connection* for BNNVARA with solid ratings.
- **Anssi Rimpelä** – the first commissioned format from Anssi will be broadcast this fall on YLE, *The World According To Comedians*. Ask him to talk about his favourite format and be as intrigued as I was.

Names in lights

Trying to keep these names truly global:

- **Bernhard Hendling** – the Austrian ex-commissioner is a hard working man, consulting for broadcasters, co-developing a format with Media Ranch and with a UK development to be announced soon.
- **Carl Schultz** – South Africa is not a market that comes to mind for paper, but genuinely lovely producers should be appreciated globally! Ex-Endemol Shine, Carl is on a mission to get South Africa on the map and he also assists other creatives to finesse their formats for the European market.
- **Orhan Gazi Karamanoglu** – ‘We create originality’

“Can we help creatives get content out into the world in a more immediate way – where they are not the hunters but the hunted?”

Siobhan Crawford



The Connection was co-developed by Kirsten Jan van Nieuwenhuijzen

is just the best tagline in our industry. Turkey has always been open to paper formats, daring even, and thankfully Orhan founded Qcontent entirely focused on unscripted, so the catalogue is growing.

Find a gem

- **Nexiko** – the growing Nordic production group is behind shows such as Discovery's *16 Ukers Helvete* (aka *16 Weeks Of Hell*) and they actively work with you and have international ambitions for their content, with unique formats like *True Colours*. This is a company you want on your ‘regular’ list.
- **European public broadcasters** – broad, I know, but you have to consider DR, NRK, SVT, VRT, BNNVARA etc. There is a reason they have distributors asking for exclusive deals. They have seasonal gems that have great central ideas and can be formatted!

Remember, all that we are looking for are original, returning formats not associated with talent but with plenty of international appeal. These creatives have as much chance as the groups of creating the next big thing and are even more incentivised to do it.

This is a relationships industry and so how big your network is really does matter - so let's support the creatives who keep going in this sometimes disheartening industry, who spam us with emails because they know one of those emails will one day work! Reward new ideas, originality will happen. **TBI**





Next-step innovation

Format creators are making the most of technology to come up with new formats that can also offer cost-efficient production techniques for buyers. Richard Middleton reports

The best formats tend to be the ones that can be explained within a single sentence. Add new technologies into the mix and describing just what the idea is can become a whole lot more complicated.

Perhaps that’s why emergent tech has found it pretty tough going over the years when it comes to format creation. Social media was touted as the next big thing a decade or more ago when it came to engaging younger viewers with competition and reality shows, but as we get further into the second decade of the 21st century, the potential of tech is beginning to be seen on screen and off it.

Intelligent insights

Earlier this year, former Talpa exec and WeMake director Moe Bennani launched his Paris-based format outfit Dreamspark, but rather than looking to embed technology on screen, the aim is to incorporate it across the entire creative process to “enhance idea generation”.

“Our main mission is to produce entertaining universes in which fascinating universal stories can be told,” he tells TBI. “As we all know, tech is already present on screen. The avatars on [Talpa format] *Avastars* for example, or augmented reality (AR) on *Dance Dance Dance*.

“However, we have chosen to first incorporate tech off screen by implementing artificial intelligence (AI) in our deep process of format creation and selling. Our first AI prototype enables us to target the most relevant clients, based solely on the synopsis of the format.”

Launched with Julien Muresianu, co-founder of tech firm Lymia, Dreamspark now claims to have a development slate of more than 20 formats focusing on social experiments, reality competitions and dating reality series, with discussions underway with channels and streamers across EMEA and North America.

Another company using tech off screen is ITV Studios (ITVS), which is exploring the use of AI for content spotting as well as remote production for its shows.

But when it comes to content creation, Arjan Pomper, MD of global entertainment at ITV Studios, points out that it is an evolutionary process rather than revolutionary.

“We’re always looking to innovate our formats with technology, but technology is never a goal - it is always a means to bring those amazing stories to the world.”

Pomper highlights ITVS’s work on online game

Avakin Life and culinary format *Hell’s Kitchen* as one way in which the group is tapping tech for bigger audiences. *The Voice Of Avakin Life* resulted in almost two million singers from around the world performing hit tracks on an immersive virtual stage, while a collaboration with The Sandbox saw the first digital restaurant of *Hell’s Kitchen* transported into a virtual world.

“Our creative labels are also working together with ITV-owned Metavision to develop formats with the metaverse fully integrated in the storylines,” he adds. “Instead of ‘TV formats’, we prefer to speak about [just] ‘formats’ as the format has one overarching story, connecting different audiences on different platforms, including the metaverse.”

Details remain scant on how these formats might look – “we can’t say too much about it,” Pomper adds – but there are direct applications for existing IP and new ideas. “Imagine this: fans of a TV show play a game in a metaverse and they donate their points won to a candidate in the TV show. We see this as an innovation of the voting mechanism.”

Virtual worlds

Banijay is also investing in ideas that can be applied to new virtual worlds and has an initiative across its footprint designed to fuel creativity and come up with IP for the metaverse.

That’s in addition to what may seem like more prosaic uses of tech, such as virtual reality (VR) for example, which is being incorporated into formats such as *Your Home* and *Your Garden Made Perfect*.

“One of the most important things creatives need to consider is if the addition of tech is authentic to the original idea,” says Lucas Green, the group’s

“Our first AI prototype enables us to target the most relevant clients, based solely on the synopsis of the format”

Moe Bennani,
Dreamspark



Chiko’s Challenge, aka *Mapi*, opposite and below, features a half-CGI, half live actor quizmaster character





global head of content operations, adding it needs to come during the development process “to ensure genuine added value”.

“In *My Body Uncovered*, tech makes it possible to see inside the body as never before and, like with the previously mentioned titles, audiences get more of an immersive experience.”

Banijay is also using tech “to elevate entertainment formats”, with Green pointing to the hybrid AR set in *Limitless Win* that provides “a great way to build scale and spectacular visuals.”

Another intriguing yet hugely effective use of video technology is *Chiko’s Challenge*, which hails from NHK in Japan and was picked up by Ed Louwse and Julian Curtis’ Netherlands-based outfit Lineup Industries. It was subsequently sold to Spanish broadcaster RTVE, which worked with Lineup to create processes allowing it to shift from being a weekly programme to stripped weekly.

The format, known as *Mapi* in Spain, challenges a group of celebrities with child-like questions, which are often surprisingly difficult to answer. The twist is that the quizmaster is a five-year-old character named Chiko, who is half CGI, half live actor, and voiced by a famous comedian.

Curtis tells TBI about the format’s multiple uses of tech, not least the CGI host who can react in animated ways to the celebrities’ answers. “It creates lots of opportunities for social media, for example,” he says, with memes of the character dominating online around its airing. The central character also has her own social media accounts, with interactions driving interest and engagement.

But arguably, the real differentiator has been RTVE’s use of the format across the week. Because of that, the broadcaster and Lineup needed to come up with a way to create the CGI footage quickly, rather than employing the labour-intensive methods

My Body Uncovered offers a look inside bodies like “never before” in a TV series

“We’re always looking to innovate our formats with technology - but technology is never a goal, it is always a means to bring those amazing stories to the world”

Arjan Pomper,
ITV Studios



that had been employed on the original NHK show.

“The big thing is how we make [the CGI] happen in post-production,” adds Curtis of the motion capture tech, “how can we use the latest developments to make it possible. It’s almost live.”

Money talks

Curtis and Louwse point to the fact that the show is using techniques from movies, but, crucially, in a cost-efficient way for a public broadcaster. The duo add that much of the tech being used is likely to be found in most major broadcasters’ studios wherever in the world they may be, making the format’s potential globally more viable.

Pomper agrees that his group’s investments into AI for content spotting and the remote production of shows will also make format production more cost-efficient, and Green agrees.

“Once the tech is made part of the format it easily forms the exportable IP, which adds even greater value to our catalogue and the production bible assets, which can then be seamlessly streamlined from one international adaptation to another.”

Pomper adds: “There are also opportunities for advertisers. Last Christmas, the main sponsor of *I’m A Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* in the UK, John Lewis, created an *I’m A Celebrity* experience in *Fortnite*. You could explore a virtual castle with new challenges rolled out weekly. By playing these games in *Fortnite*, users got coupons for the John Lewis stores. John Lewis launched their famous Christmas commercial in this virtual castle as well.”

While such applications might be somewhat removed from the creative process of coming up with a new Saturday night gameshow, for example, they underline the potential avenues that format creators can now explore.

Bennani says AI offers huge potential for the format business, “to enhance creativity, sales and production” while Pomper adds that the metaverse, or virtual worlds, will enable creators “to bring a format across different touchpoints to connect different generations and bring them together as fans of your brand. We see the metaverse as the more affordable digital bridge between the linear passive viewer and the younger active user.”

“For us so far, it has been VR and AR. These areas have been a natural fit for imaginative fact-ent formats which explore the world and entertain with compelling narratives,” Green adds. “Having said that, we see scope for a completely new kind of entertainment in the metaverse and it’s a venture we are boldly looking at.” **TBI**

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Uphill battle

Resilient, long-established formats and a desire for IP that can instantly cut through make for a tough market for new ideas. Richard Middleton hears how the industry is shifting

Format reboots have had their fair share of bad press over the past few months, notably at the Edinburgh TV Festival in late summer.

Yet the demands from broadcasters and streamers to have shows that instantly cut through the noise make them understandably irresistible to buyers, but is the trend softening? And what about the associated risks of rebooting a format that was last a hit a decade ago? Can this IP still do the business?

For Kevin Lygo, MD of media and entertainment at ITV in the UK, the format market continues to provide a key route to attracting large audiences. Yet he is clear that while the underlying IP is important, the bigger issue is how the format will be produced.

"The format is of course vital and it is the first block, but it is only 25% or 35%," he told the industry at RTS London last month. "I am more interested in who will produce it and host it," he added, with the comments coming in the midst of preparations to re-introduce one of the heavy hitters of the format

Survivor has turned 25 years old and is currently more successful than ever before

world - *Big Brother* - back into the UK after a five-year hiatus. Just how the rebooted show looks remains to be seen but Natalka Znak, CEO at Banijay-owned Remarkable TV Entertainment, Initial and Znak TV, rejects any notion that repurposing the IP for the new UK version, which she is overseeing, will be easy.

"It's a hard job to reboot such a popular show... TV has moved on from when *Big Brother* was first on and we used to just love watching people eat their Cornflakes. The trick is to keep the heart of it and make it modern," she says.

There are also balancing acts to perform with such a format, she adds, most notably drawing in the "hard core fans, who are saying don't change it" while ensuring it also attracts new viewers. "My 16-year-old daughter doesn't know what it is," she adds.

It is an intriguing conundrum for Lygo, too, who explains that the show will sit on ITV2 and soon-to-launch streamer ITTVX - rather than flagship linear network ITV - because of the likely ratings.

“ITV has to be all things to all people. We need mass appeal... although with ITVX we are moving into more niche shows that don’t need to have such broadness,” he adds.

Lygo adds that *Big Brother*, like *Love Island* - one of the commercial broadcaster’s biggest recent format hits, which also sits on ITV2 - finds a natural home from a scheduling point of view away from the main channel, partly because it provides some protection for the IP.

“Normally these shows get one or two million if you’re lucky so the danger is that if you had it on the main channel, there’d be talk it’s not working. And also, the way it works best is if you flood the channel and I’m not sure it would be appropriate for ITV, which has a public remit. Plus it could scare people.”

Reinventing the establishment

While *Big Brother*’s re-entrance to the UK has perhaps taken some domestic industry watchers by surprise, there are few raised eyebrows elsewhere.

K7 Media’s annual report on the top 100 travelling unscripted formats, *Tracking The Giants*, earlier this year revealed *Big Brother* had secured six new versions in 2021, in addition to a slew of renewals including in the US, where it’s into 25th season.

The report underlines the ongoing strength of well-established formats securing new commissions, with Sony Pictures Television’s evergreen quizzer *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* bagging nine new sales and Fremantle’s *Game Of Talents* snagging seven.

Such trends highlight the troubles facing format creators trying to push new ideas, although Lygo points to the fact that interpretation plays a key role when shows are being pitched.

“*The Masked Singer*, for example, was pitched to everybody including us and we turned it down,” he explains. “I was then shown a clip of the Korean version and it’s doing that that makes that particular show, it’s as important as the clockwork mechanics.”

Clearly, however, format success derives further from commissioning. Banijay recently celebrated the 25th year anniversary of adventure reality format, *Survivor*, by revealing it had had its most successful year-to-date last year, with 25 productions in 2021.

Yet that doesn’t mean commissioners aren’t on the look-out for new ideas – it just may take some time. Clare Laycock, SVP & head of content and planning at Warner Bros. Discovery UK, says the key for her company is to find shows that work as tapes and then move into local versions.

She points to *90 Day Fiancé* as an example. “That started in the US and we’ve now done 30 remakes, with a UK version that has been massive. We’re on that

“It is about finding the middle ground of keeping original formats and then adding layers onto them - that doesn’t mean you’ve run out of ideas”

Gama Gbio,
Expectation



journey but it has taken 10 years of heritage to get this many fans in.”

Znak and Laycock agree that creating a new format takes time and patience, most notably from the streamers and broadcasters buying the shows, and there’s no shortcut when it comes to creating a show that can travel.

Gama Gbio, Expectation’s development producer of entertainment, says: “trying to globally develop a hit comes afterwards. Even with a show like *Love Island*, the first version took a few seasons to become the hit we know. And then it became a global show.”

Gbio adds that for development executives, there is a balance to be found. “It is about finding the middle ground of keeping original formats and then adding layers onto them. That doesn’t mean you’ve run out of ideas,” she says, pointing to the dating trend of recent years that has delivered shows such as Netflix’s *Love Is Blind* and *Too Hot To Handle*.

Laycock adds that for many, including WBD, the aim is to “look after the big, valuable brands, which have been around a long time, but we need to refresh them with twists and talent.” And there are also new formats, she says, pointing to Discovery+ dating format *Written In The Stars*, which combines perennial favourite dating with astrology. “These are risky, they’re big swings and you go in with your heart in your mouth a bit.”

And while breakthrough formats on the global stage are few and far between – arguably *The Masked Singer* has been the only real success of the last decade – it is clear to see why.

“We are quite brutal, I admit it,” Lygo says. “If a show doesn’t work early on, we kill it. In the old days you could adapt, but now I don’t do an entertainment show without a proper fully funded pilot.” And as competition between streamers and broadcasters continues to rise, there is no reason why that particular format trend will end any time soon. **TBI**

Celebrity Survivor Italy is one of the 25 versions of the format in production last year



Formats Hot Picks

Our pick of the latest, greatest formats heading to market

Top
Pick

Finder\$ Keeper\$

Producer: PIT

Distributor: Be-Entertainment

Broadcaster: VTM (Belgium)

Logline: Families get 30 minutes to hunt down cash prizes hidden in multiple locations around their own homes - but finding the cash will be far from easy

From the minds of *Send in the Clowns* creatives Kamiel De Bruyne and Wannes Deleu comes this new entertainment format, with a straightforward premise and a huge potential for comedy chaos.

Fortunate families get the chance to win up to €100,000 (\$97,000), so long as they can find it. The cash is hidden in various locations around their own home and they get 30 minutes to hunt it down and keep as much as they can find.

However, the task isn't as easy as it sounds, with the cash hidden in myriad locations, ranging from inside sealed bags of cereal to the inside of an unopened bottle of wine, within game consoles or behind a newly built fake wall.

After 30 minutes, the buzzer sounds and the family has just 10 seconds to leave the house, otherwise the prize money they've grabbed will be halved.

"Our expert team of hiders create the craziest hiding places," reveals Be-Entertainment MD Gepke Nederlof. "They take objects from the house and replace them with replicas that are just slightly different from the

original so the family can't notice them - like a Buddha statue that is wearing a small gold necklace with a dollar sign on it. Or a bottle of wine from 'Chateau D'Argent'."

Nederlof reveals that a big part of the entertainment comes from how the different family members approach getting their hands on the cash. "We love the dilemmas and the way they are handled differently by other family members. Like a champagne tower on the kitchen table with money underneath... the woman of the house carefully takes the tower down glass by glass, where the man just shoves the whole tower on the ground and gets the cash."

She adds: "We've already seen hilarious scenes and hiding places in the first episode and there is a long list of dilemmas and hiding places that will be shown in the full series that is now in production."

Highlighting the format's international appeal, Nederlof says: "The idea is very simple and most of all entertaining. This is not like anything we've seen before. The humour and lightness will hopefully make it stand out from others."





Home Tutor

Producer: Nippon TV

Distributor: Nippon TV

Broadcaster: Nippon TV (Japan)

Logline: Scripted format in which three families receive help from a home tutor that provides them with some important life lessons

This scripted format tells the story of three mothers and their children, all of different ages, as they deal with common life problems and who are saved by a peculiar home tutor.

The women are from diverse backgrounds, but are united in dealing with the pressure of motherhood and the hope of getting their children into their dream schools. With the help of a home tutor, the families learn valuable life lessons.

“Times are always changing but one very important, constant life lesson would be ‘how to use money wisely’. The team created a story where the



student, as well as their family and even the tutor herself, changes drastically after going through her peculiar but unique life lessons focusing on money and life decisions,” Yuki Akehi, director of international business development at Nippon TV, tells TBI. “Watching and following

this process, viewers of the series will sense a feeling of hope, which is what the team wanted the viewers to experience.

“At the end of the series, audiences who have seen this drama will want to meet the tutor again. The tutor herself knows that money is just an

object, something neutral to anyone. How someone spends money is up to them. Thus, students (and the viewers) learn through her about the importance of spending money wisely, how one must feel towards it and how to use it in order to live a life well spent.”

Art On The Brain

Producer: BBC Studios ANZ

Distributor: BBC Studios

Broadcaster: ABC (Australia)

Logline: Social experiment testing if the simple act of creativity can help heal the invisible wounds of poor mental health

This new 6 x 60-minute fact-ent format follows people facing mental health issues who aim to better their lives through art - guided by a psychotherapist and acclaimed artists.

Sumi Connock, creative director of formats at BBC Studios, tells TBI: “Our development team was aware that while there were a lot of campaigns and initiatives in Australia surrounding mental health awareness, cases of suicide were still increasing at an alarming rate. They felt that now was the time for TV to help

remove the stigma of mental illness and explore activities that could have a positive impact on people’s health and wellbeing.”

Connock reveals: “The team’s research from around the world uncovered the positive impact that art therapy could have on mental wellbeing, and that’s when *Art On The Brain* (or *Space 22*, as the show was known in Australia) started to come together.”

Casting producers worked alongside a specialist Australian mental health organisation. Shortlisted contributors



underwent rigorous psychological testing with a psychologist before being cast.

“Mental ill health is a global issue, made worse by the pandemic. One in four of us will experience symptoms of mental illness in any given year and *Art On The Brain* offers hope for the 900 million people

worldwide who are suffering right now. This format is a unique, uplifting and ambitious social experiment to see whether art can help heal the mind. It’s also backed by scientific research which monitors real results for the participants as they are surveyed at the beginning and the end of the experiment.”

Hungry For Love

Producer: Sipur, HSCC

Distributor: Sipur

Broadcaster: HOT (Israel)

Logline: Reality dating show meets psychological experiment as couples looking for love must go on a date every time they get hungry



This one is a reality dating show with a psychological experiment twist. The premise connects physical and emotional hunger, claiming that if people become as active looking for love as when looking for a meal, chances of finding love increase.

Therefore, the series has only one rule - no one eats alone. If participants are hungry, they must go on a date. One bachelor and one bachelorette, guided by a professional therapist, will participate in the experiment with the goal of dining their way to romance.

The format stems from a co-development deal between Sipur and Stampede, with Sipur's head of unscripted, Zipi Rozenblum, the creator.

"Our show is not fully casted a priori, we are covering our protagonist's authentic search for a meal date and follow how their stories further develop," reveals Sipur's Michael Schmidt, who executive produces.

"We do not know whom they

will meet and have not designed or pre-produced the dates, that is all in our participants hands.

"The show is engaging and surprising, it feels real and authentic. We feel with, and root for, our protagonists and want to see them being successful in their quest for love."

Schmidt says that the format is a "noisy idea on the surface", but its conceit allows producers to "tell intimate stories of lovable characters that make us laugh and cry."

It's a premise that should be internationally appealing, he says. "Simple, yet universal and approachable - it can be done everywhere by everyone."

He adds: "On top of that, and unlike some other more complicated dating formats, everybody at home can try the scheme of *Hungry For Love* for themselves and see what happens to their dating life."

The show will make its global debut on Israeli platform HOT later this year.

Le Plus Grand Karaoké de France

Producer: DMLSTV

Distributor: Banijay Rights

Broadcaster: M6 (France)

Logline: Musical competition show of massive scale as 6,000 people perform karaoke, but only 1,000 among them have microphones – and judges choose who is the best singer

Another singing format, but this one sees 6,000 people belt out songs as part of a giant karaoke event. Among the participants, only 1,000 will be equipped with headsets and microphones. Behind the scenes, experts - singing teachers, musicians and vocal coaches - have the task of selecting the best as the four rounds of the competition roll.

The stakes get higher throughout the show, with the finalists given the opportunity to perform a duet on stage with a star before one contestant is named the best karaoke singer. "We wanted to create a big music show where everyone could be involved: the artists on stage, the audience and the viewers at home," reveals Mathieu Vergne, president of DMLS TV. "We knew this show would be popular as the audience's need to party, sing, and be together has never been stronger," he adds.

Vergne describes casting so many people as a "huge task" which involved contestants

sending in videos of themselves singing.

"For us, it wasn't just about finding the very best singers or performers, but making sure the participants represented a real cross-section of our society. We have a diverse range of participants who all share a passion for singing and music.

"The strength of this show is everyone has a chance to participate, with 1,000 people mic'd up to sing on stage - this really brings a positive atmosphere of the show."

Vergne tells TBI that the format is "very ambitious, in its scale both visually and in the number of participants, and its use of technology. We had 1,000 contestants with a microphone connected to their mobile, which allowed experts backstage to hear their voices and judge who should go through to the next round.

"We had to get used to this brand-new technology and determine areas of the software that could be made more efficient for future shows."



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