

TBI Television Business International

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Fallen RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW Fosca
THIS TOWN Archer THREE LITTLE BIRDS
GRANTCHESTER BLOW UP NURSE LEA
SURVIVOR

The Good Friend
The Curse
ANONYMOUS

NO STRINGS ATTACHED
BAD EDUCATION

Big Brother

DROWNING IN LIES

THE SUMMIT

DATE MY MATE

DOMINA

Boomerissima

THE SANDHAMN MURDERS

LARA VS ESCOBAR Beck

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Young MasterChef

SAVE THE DATE BORIS

Special Forces: World's Toughest Test

The Big Interiors Battle



Banijay Rights presents...
The London TV Screenings

BOSSANOVA



ANCIENT EGYPT BY TRAIN

4 x 60'

History & Mystery



CASTLE SECRETS

8 x 60'

History & Mystery



THE CASKETEERS

6 Series: 46 x 30'

Access & Obs Docs

TBI February/March 2023

Editor's note

Buyers from around the world will be jetting into the UK and France over the coming weeks as London TV Screenings and Series Mania get underway, but one can only hope the industry turbulence isn't reflected in travel experiences.



The global SVODs that have provided the jetstreams on which the industry has been riding have become somewhat bumpy, after the bean counters realised that ever increasing expense on content doesn't necessarily deliver equivalent profits.

It is a seriously thorny problem, so we turned to four of the most knowledgeable and experienced execs in the global business – BBC Studios chief Tom Fussell, ITV Studios CEO Julian Bellamy, Fremantle's global COO & European CEO Andrea Scrosati and Banijay's COO Peter Langenberg – to give us their insights into just what's going on (page 10). Representing four of the original founding companies behind London TV Screenings, they are among the best-placed people to tell us what's really happening behind the scenes – both within their own companies and across the global ecosystem in which they operate.

We also explore how Ukraine's TV industry is defying the odds as it continues to operate a year on from the Russian invasion, there's a deep dive on podcasts, an array of hot picks and opinions to devour, plus our annual London TV Screenings map – it's going to be busy...

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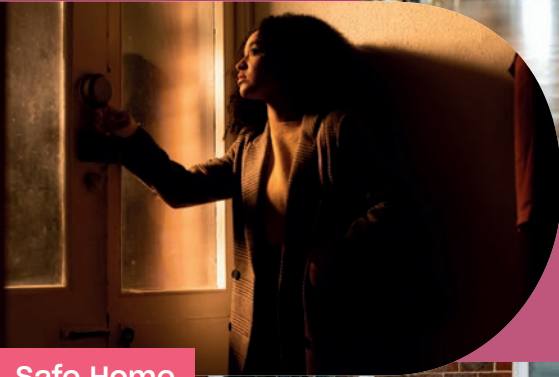


**Banijay
Rights**

Marie Antoinette



Safe Home



Then You Run



Bad Education



Les Disparus de la Forêt Noire





Grantchester

Domina



Anonymous



Riches



Stonehouse

#Storymakersforalifetime

About Town

Writing on the wall

Buyers, producers, distributors and financiers took to the skies again in mid-January as the once-regular rhythm of a Miami market and Realscreen saw delegates hit the US for their early year catch-ups.

Austin was the Texan base for those of a factual persuasion while Content Americas opened its doors for the first time, based out of a downtown Hilton in the Floridian state capital.

A broad array of execs were in attendance and Spanish-language programming was at the centre of discussions, with Fernando Medin, Warner Bros. Discovery's chief in Latin America, explaining how streamers are instigating a "redefinition" of streamer content as they look to combine local, regional and global shows.

About Town, meanwhile, was redefining its Miami-style cocktail and networking attire following an enforced three-year layoff. And despite the lack of a beach, poolside drink receptions in the relatively balmy warmth were still on offer, with Spanish audiovisual



body ICEX among those proffering beverages to sate sales people's thirst. There were also parties aplenty, including Secuoya Studios throwing a fancy bash at the nearby Klaw Miami and Telemundo Global Studios taking over The Temple House. Karen Barroeta, EVP of production & development, took to the stage to introduce a slate of originals while stars William Levy and Samadhi Zendejas

drew the attention as they donned their finest threads and discussed the company's upcoming series.

Perhaps the last word should go to those behind the scenes, however, who transformed the whitewashed walls of the Miami Beach venue into an immersive goldfish bowl that put Telemundo's series – literally – onto every available surface. Quite a sight.

The first of us

HBO's new post-apocalyptic drama *The Last Of Us* is pulling in plaudits from across the globe and quickly turning into a ratings success for the US network.

So TBI leapt at the chance to take an early look at its third episode – one of the show's best-received instalments – at a special screening attended by director Peter Hoar, actor Murray Bartlett, and cinematographer Eben Bolter.

The trio then took questions from the audience following the screening, discussing in detail how an iconic section of the original video game was brought to the screen.



Boxed in



The Tate Modern in London was the well-decorated venue for this year's Outside The Box conference, which saw notables from the worlds of media, politics and sport getting together to ruminate on the importance of public broadcasters. Banijay UK chief Patrick Holland was on stage to discuss his firm's plans while *Sherwood* scribe James Graham shared doubts that his BBC crime drama would have been of interest to a global streamer, adding that the industry must shout more about pubcaster successes.

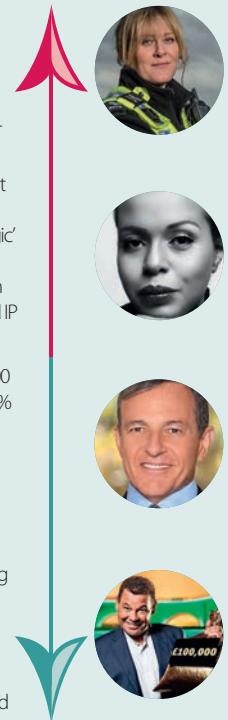
Swings & Roundabouts

7.68 bn A record £6.27bn (\$7.68bn) was spent on high-end TV and film production in the UK last year, according to the BFI, with *Doctor Who* and *Happy Valley* contributing to a post-pandemic recovery

750k Areej Noor's Statement Films secured \$750k seed funding from NBA star Earvin 'Magic' Johnson, actor Samuel L Jackson and director & producer LaTanya Richardson Jackson to produce African women-led IP for international buyers

7,000 Disney is cutting 7,000 jobs – more than 3.5% of its workforce – and slashing \$3bn from content spend as it overhauls its operations in a restructure launched by recently returned CEO, Bob Iger

7 *Moneybags* and *Game Of Clones* producer Youngest Media is closing after seven years of operation, citing the long-term effects of the pandemic on its business. The company, set up by Endemol Shine Group duo David Flynn and Lucas Church in 2016, entered liquidation proceedings in February





Formats Siobhan Crawford

Devil in the detail

“There is no point sharing IP if a broadcaster makes it look so local it can’t travel”

Shall we talk about sharing? It’s the nice thing to do, right? Not when it comes to IP. Sharing hurts. Sharing means you feel you lose your power and the reward for your hard work, but sometimes it might be appropriate.

The basics

What is IP sharing?

1. Ownership in the format concept (in the broadest legal definition) is shared between parties
2. Revenue generated from exploitation of the format is shared between parties

Both can be true, but also only one can be true. You can agree to only a revenue split (option 2) – this means IP remains entirely within your company and a contract stipulates the terms of shared revenue, plus other key details. Start here and then negotiate out.

¿Cuánto cuesta?

But how much to share? It depends on the ‘why’.

Commission: Broadcasters can (and do) ask for 50% of future revenues for commissioning a paper format. Remember, this is IP ownership – it is separate from distribution commission, which will have come off the top (gross revenues). There is an argument to ‘map the markets’ as some broadcasters don’t require IP, while some have started at 25% and will work up to 50% – but compare this against which territories commission the most formats, which broadcaster/territory creates the most ‘value’ and the format’s international launch. The amount of investment you do as a format owner prior to commission can also impact negotiations – producing more materials including trailer, pilot and full decks can mean you can retain 70% instead of 50%.

Sales boost: This US/UK model sees broadcasters demand up to 40% because they think their local commission may bump sales. I refuse these, you should too. Focus on growing in Europe.

Co-develop or relaunch: If you co-create a format then the share is 50/50, but if you come at a later stage or make valuable contributions to the format or redevelop it, then negotiations begin. The ceiling here is 60/40 but you have to weigh the contributions.

Reasons to share

This is not an exhaustive list, rather a list of scenarios that could merit some revenue share:

- If you win a format pitch prize and you are contractually obligated
- If you knowingly submit to a format fund
- If someone pays/invests in your pilot/trailer. Note, however, that in the event of failure to commission you can buy them out or negotiate out of this contract after a reasonable period of time (it may require a first right of refusal later but at least your IP is made whole)
- Using a distributor to launch a paper format is effective but paper is harder to sell than commissioned, so a nominal revenue split is reasonable
- If a broadcaster commissions your paper format (keeping an international identity to the content) and commits to the international roll-out. This means a second season is likely to be commissioned during the first season run; they keep the episodes in a good primetime/suitable slot for the whole run; and make efforts to promote locally/internationally. There is no point sharing IP if a broadcaster makes it look so local it can’t travel. Look for commissions with international intentions
- Co-development. When co-developing a paper format idea you should expect to share revenue between creators. This can also occur post-broadcast – if a format is broadcast in one version and then *substantially* changed with development required in another adaptation, then a share of IP ownership for the new version is likely to be requested but this does not mean localisation. Be really clear here what qualifies
- Sometimes you need talent to sell a project. This can be on-screen talent or EP credits but if they help sell the project by being attached it is likely they want a share

The next column will be the ‘when not to share’ and contract language. So, if someone asks you to ‘share’ between now and then, tell them to hold that thought!

See, it’s not just sarcasm that I give you. **TBI**

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



Scripted Anthony Kimble

In the long run... I'll always love a limited series

“This obsession with long running, returning series never developed in quite the same way outside of the US as the budgets just weren’t there”

From *Dahmer* and *Dropout* to *We Own This City* and *The White Lotus*, limited (or mini or anthology) series have been punching above their weight for some time now. They’ve been grabbing more than their fair share of press coverage, setting the Twittersphere alight and frequently being held up as the sort of content we should all aspire to create.

Why then, when many such titles are getting their just rewards during the current awards season, is it still virtually impossible to get a limited series commissioned in the US?

At the Golden Globes in January, Mike White, showrunner on *The White Lotus*, hilariously called out the network execs and talent that passed on the show when he was trying to pull it together. It took absolutely eons to arrange everything – from finance to cast – but the schadenfreude of this show now winning everything in sight, being lauded as a pinnacle of televisual achievement and getting recommissioned season after season, is just delightful.

Commissioners everywhere have to constantly balance risk and reward – but after spending much of my career in Europe, I’m wondering if there’s still just too much money floating around in America. This obsession with long running, returning series never developed in quite the same way outside of the US as the budgets just weren’t there. As a result, getting a three or six-hour limited series away was never seen as ‘less’ – and indeed, this approach has delivered some truly exquisite TV in recent years with series such as *The English* or *Chernobyl* in the UK or *Clan* in Belgium, all three amongst my personal favourites.

I’m not suggesting we do away with long-running series – they can become powerful brands that define channels and platforms, locking in subscribers and viewers and they employ vast numbers of people in the industry, often for years at a time. I just think it’s time to shake things up a little. More limited, mini or anthology series would mean even more creativity, more new ideas, more productions in general and even more choice for viewers. And crucially, bigger stars too. Major talent rarely wants to make a decade-long commitment to one show. Even two seasons is a lot for some: while I can’t wait to see what Jon Hamm brings

in season three, I will miss seeing Steve Carell on *The Morning Show*.

But how do we balance the need for monetising a franchise with telling a great story and not run the risk of taking amazing IP and diluting it to the point where it starts to lose audience share and appeal? It’s inevitable really, that perhaps other than the procedurals that fill the schedules and that we all love to snack on from time to time, long-running dramas usually see fatigue set in at some point. Sadly, the plug rarely gets pulled at the right time.

And this is at the heart of why I’m a massive fan of limited series. They are fabulous at telling a rounded story – with proper beginnings, middles, and ends. With most of my time spent developing and producing scripted shows (yes, quite a few of my projects, but not all, are limited series), the time I have to actually watch TV is less than I’d like. So, when I do sit down to engage, I want great storylines, clever characters, resolutions and to know how much of my life I need to invest. I find it so much more satisfying than being left with a cliff-hanger after 12+ episodes and no idea if the show will return to resolve it – or know that it will return but have to a year for answers. It’s the difference between savouring one great and memorable meal each week at a leading restaurant versus having take-out from the same fast-food outlet every evening. I know what I’d prefer.

With so many streamers and channels, and the US more open to international ideas than ever before, I remain hopeful that we are entering a period of greater experimentation around content and that commissioning limited series won’t remain a niche activity. I’m calling for greater risk-taking – but I’m not quite sure why limited series are seen as a major risk in the first place. We have so much proof that good ones attract audiences, advertisers and awards, and provide great watercooler moments. And they rarely require the sort of investment that a long-running series needs.

On top of that, I have a sneaking suspicion that even the most powerful network and streamer execs use their down time wisely and enjoy a good limited series for all the same reasons I do. Let’s face it, in this industry, as in life, less is frequently more... **TBI**

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



Diversity Deborah Williams

Long term gain

“Are we falling into the commodification trap, where diversity is only useful if it brings financial rewards in the short term?”

As buyers from all over the world arrive in the UK for London Screenings, and our creatives head out to awards ceremonies, I wanted to share a bit of what’s on Creative Diversity Network (CDN)’s horizon this year.

Diamond Reloaded – an improved version of our world-leading, industry-wide diversity monitoring and reporting system – is coming to town. It’s becoming a reality quicker than I had anticipated. As part of its introduction, the Creative Diversity Network team is reviewing everything: survey questions, industry members and partners, staffing and ways of working.

We are bringing in new team members and creating new roles to ensure that we have the right capacity and resources to lead and support our members – and the industry as a whole – to increase diversity and inclusion on- and off-screen.

Disruption is great for progress and growth, but at the same time, it’s challenging to see some of the disruption happening now with streamers and linear broadcasters.

At Realscreen in January, some delegates were encouraged by the red meat thrown their way from buyers, but not me. There was no mention of diversity and little understanding of the impact of their restructuring on expediting inclusion.

It wasn’t all doom and gloom though. Around the same time, new content was announced while M&A activity is ramping up and everyone is announcing new pots and funds to back creative talent.

Mulling all of this over, my thoughts are around where and when diversity, change, disruption and progression fit into this year’s roadmap and strategies.

So here is a genuine question: are we falling into the commodification trap? The one where diversity is only useful if you can see that it will bring financial rewards in the short term, but it’s not worth doing if it requires long term planning, thinking and engagement.

Do we risk falling for white, male perspectives of diversity and the ‘cancel culture’ bandwagon that it

somehow is a negative ‘trend’ in the industry that needs to be countered?

People trying to get a start in the industry are still being told by some commissioners that there is no point coming up with a ‘diversity’ perspective on a familiar format as those familiar formats don’t sell, according to the feedback I got from a selection of participants in Austin.

At the same time, we are being told that new isn’t needed either! That we should be looking into the IP bins to come up with ideas for reboots, from an age when diversity and inclusion on television was non-existent. It makes me wonder if disruption is really happening, and if it is, then on whose terms are we working to?

The data sets and evidence from Diamond, BFI and Screenskills are clear. We need thousands, not hundreds, of new people to enter the industry to maintain our global position.

That, alongside the rising costs of production and industry stagnation in development, suggests to me that we are nowhere near as comfortable as we propret to be with disruptive practices and understanding diversity as a core business proposition rather than performative and tokenistic, or a short cut to non-white revenue streams.

So, when you watch and contemplate buying new content at London Screenings, Series Mania or across the year ahead, I encourage you to think about whether it’s this commodified and reductive version or really game-changing diverse content, that increases discomfort as well as bottom lines.

Let’s not just stick with the equivalent of an online book title search, in which you look for one you like and then shoehorn something diverse in that you think might get you that sale. Instead, maybe you should just move out of the way, let the real disruption have its moment in the sun. Let the citizen journalists and bedroom creators do their thing and bring to the surface work that will excite, reignite and save the future of UK broadcasting. **TBI**

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



Legal Julian Wilkins

Never gonna give you up

“What if catchphrases or lines from TV were copied and impersonated in a context where the defence of parody and pastiche were not available?”

Eighties pop wonderkid Rick Astley has issued proceedings in the US against rapper Yung Gravy (aka Matthew Hauri) and others concerning his breakout song ‘Betty (Get Money)’ in which someone impersonates Astley’s voice from 1987 hit ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’.

Rick Astley contends the impersonation gives the impression that he allowed his song to be sampled on the Yung Gravy track.

The Los Angeles court action claims the impersonation violates Astley’s ‘right of publicity’, meaning the performer has a legal right to control how his name, image or likeness is commercially exploited by a third party.

Astley’s lawyer’s statement of case reads: “In an effort to capitalise off of the immense popularity and goodwill of Mr. Astley, defendants... conspired to include a deliberate and nearly indistinguishable imitation of Mr. Astley’s voice throughout the song.” The claim states that the public will believe it is Astley singing as: “To this day, the song remains embedded in the cultural zeitgeist.”

‘Betty’ was a significant hit appealing to the TikTok generation but also attracting a nostalgia audience because of Astley’s voice – or at least what was thought to be his voice.

Astley’s court claims include breach of the Lanham Act entitled ‘False Designation of Origin and False Descriptions Forbidden’; this is the equivalent of the UK’s passing off laws.

The defendants’ alleged actions constitute false designation of origin and false representation in commerce. Allegedly, Gravy asserts Astley endorsed his song whereby he “fucks with the song.” I understand in old money that means Astley likes the song, though his legal team deny such endorsements.

The other allegation is violation of the California Civil Code for the illegal appropriation of Astley’s property interest in his identity.

Reports allege that Gravy and his team cleared

the underlying musical composition to ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’, which Astley does not own. This clearance gave the legal right to ‘interpolate’ or recreate music and lyrics from the original song in their new track.

Astley’s lawsuit states Gravy and his team were not given the licence to use the actual soundtrack. Had they had such a licence, they could have sampled Astley’s singing. Instead of using Astley’s voice, Gravy’s team hired Popnick (Nick Seeley) to impersonate him.

Bette Midler successfully sued Ford in 1988 when a series of adverts used a performer impersonating her voice – although the car manufacturer had licenced the song, it had not licenced her performance.

The implications of this court action could be significant. What if iconic catchphrases or lines from film and TV were copied and impersonated in a context where the defence of parody and pastiche were not available?

What if the use of AI allowed you to artificially create a scene from a TV programme?

What about deceased performers’ estates protecting residual rights?

Currently, Getty Images has launched two copyright actions in the UK and US whereby they contend an AI company has breached their copyright. Getty argues its archive is being used to ‘train’ the AI to create its own photographs and images, but derived the data required from reading their photographic images.

The Astley case and the Getty litigation could have wide implications on the application of copyright, passing off and image rights laws. Whether it is human versus human as per the Rick Astley case or human versus AI, the legal evolution of protecting rights and determining what is permissible continues. I suspect it will be sometime before we can say in the words of ‘Never Gonna Give You Up’: “We know the game and we’re gonna play it.” **TBI**

Julian is a consultant solicitor and notary public with Eldwick Law, and a founding member of mediation and arbitration practice Q Chambers



GRANITE HARBOUR



DOPAMINE



DESPERATE MEASURES



KRYPTO KINGS

feelgood 2 Play

eccho rights

As buyers flock to London Screenings & Series Mania, TBI speaks to four leading figures in the global industry about content strategy, streamer spending, M&A and what the coming months have in store

Breaking out



BBC Studios CEO Tom Fussell tells Richard Middleton about the UK powerhouse's global acquisition plans, its unique factual proposition and riding the streaming turbulence



IT'S ALMOST SIX MONTHS since BBC Studios CEO Tom Fussell delivered a headline-grabbing plan at MIPCOM to double revenues within five years.

If six months can feel a long time in politics, it's a whole other era in the recent history of TV and streaming.

Since Fussell's keynote address, the global SVODs that propelled the content industry

to new heights have been rapidly deploying the brakes on spending. Prompted by angry Wall Street investors, subscriber growth at (almost) any cost is out and profits are in.

One suspects that behind the scenes, production group chiefs who rely on this spend are gulping for air. For Fussell, context is key and best highlighted by reflecting on the overall surge of spending over the past decade, but he admits that a correction is in motion, adding that there's "some shock" to be dealt with.

"But things peak, then they settle down and people get back to more fundamental economics, that is just inevitable," he tells TBI. And the guiding lights for BBCS, from *Doctor Who* to David

Attenborough-fronted *Planet Earth III*, look likely to be key as it seeks to return ever-increasing amounts back to parent broadcaster, the BBC. "We are fishing in a part of the industry where there is still strong demand for the best of British creativity. And that is exactly what we stand for," says Fussell, whose company makes 75% of its revenue from production and sales to third parties.

Flexible thinking

Talk to almost any producer and it's clear that there are real budgetary squeezes being felt. Yet there are also upsides to the US-based streamers' spending cuts – namely, that they want more bang for their buck. And that means potential for those operating in lower cost production communities outside of the US, as well as a more open-minded approach to rights.

"A year or so ago the streamers were saying they'd only commission on work for hire, but that model is – well, people are being more flexible, let's put it that way," Fussell says. For a non-US heavyweight producer with a giant sales arm, the potential is clear.

You might expect Fussell to then throw a few scripted or high-end

factual co-pros into conversation, but he instead shifts the attention to kids content and Australian megahit, *Bluey*. BBCS, which now houses what was BBC Children's In-House Production, is distributor and co-commissioner on the ABC show, which Disney+ picked up in numerous territories. The deal underlines both BBCS's deepening relationship with the Mouse House – such as the huge deal to take *Doctor Who* global (excluding the UK & Ireland) – but also the ambition of the UK-based firm to extend its reach.

“In a world in which you might see some people retrenching and taking less risk, that is not what we are about now. We need to take more creative risks and back people – we know we are here for the long term. We are in a good place this year with the economic conditions and are powered up for growth,” Fussell says.

On scripted, the CEO points to shows such as Sid Gentle Films' *Extraordinary*, Clerkenwell Films' *Somewhere Boy* and Lookout Point's *Happy Valley* S3 as directions of travel. Each are produced by BBCS-owned production entities, with commissioners ranging from Disney+ EMEA to Channel 4 and the BBC, respectively.

But US commissions are also top of mind. Scripted chief Mark Linsey upped sticks to LA last year to lead co-productions and commissioning, and it's clear Fussell smells opportunity in the Hollywood hills.

“Mark is there to really understand the US market and its tastes so we can take that business on with all the creativity coming out of the UK. We will be creatively led out of the UK by all our labels, but the demand is there,” Fussell says.

Acquisition appetite

There is, however, a shift in terms of BBCS's habit of investing only in UK production groups (the acquisition of Rapid Blue in South Africa in 2016 a notable recent exception.)

“We have set up organically in some places outside the UK, but we are also now looking at other opportunities to invest in companies internationally,” Fussell adds, with that mission made more feasible after last year's decision to increase the company's borrowing capability from £350m (\$420m) to £750m by 2027.

“The biggest thing for us is cultural fit and to make sure [acquired companies & creatives] really get us – we are a BBC global company and we have the BBC brands and values behind us. Everyone gets what that means.”

What about the rampant industry consolidation around the world? “Does, say, Banijay's Endemol Shine deal affect us? Not really. They are running their business really well, doing what they're doing, and we are in our space doing what we do.

“You know from the people we are acquiring it's not on that scale, we are setting up really great talented people on a smaller scale but we know the niche we need and that works much better for us.”

Recent scripted deals such as those for Liz Kilgariff's Firebird Pictures and a minority stake in *Small Axe* producer, Turbine Studios, have trodden the UK-based path but international M&A is being explored. There has also been movement on unscripted, with BBCS buying *Inside The Factory's* Voltage TV and acquiring a 25% stake in Mothership Productions, Kelly Webb-Lamb's unscripted indie.

Unscripted urges

These moves have bolstered BBCS's factual cannons and Fussell points to unscripted growth “coming from all avenues”, including the October tie-up with *My Octopus Teacher* director James Reed.

He also has the might of *Planet Earth III* producer, the Natural History Unit, to rely on and the nature of such blue chip shows means some wrinkles in the streamers' short-term spending strategies can be smoothed out over the longer term life of a big factual commission.

“Some of these [factual] shows have long lead times and we have a big pipeline with the BBC taking us across the next decade, with other partners also involved,” he adds. Fussell also picks out BBCS's Science Unit under Andrew Cohen as a key performer, adding that the sector is one “where we are seeing budgets grow, because we are one of the very small number of people who can make those shows.”

More rich SVOD deals such as the Discovery pact struck in 2019 look unlikely but the BBCS CEO points to recent shows such as Apple TV+'s *Prehistoric Planet* as an example of the multi-commissioner ecosystem available: “It means creatives can make different shows for different people, because not all platforms want the same thing,” he says.

Tried and trusted brands are also raising revenue, as BBCS's formats business continues to wring value from its line-up with *Bake Off* recently entering Algeria – marking the 40th territory for the Love Productions show. And global trends for local scripted remakes also plays into BBCS's scripted format strategy, which has seen shows such as *Luther* head into India and *Doctor Foster* remade in Korea. “These are working really well, and we're seeing growth as streamers want localisation and local audiences,” Fussell adds.

Channels & consolidation

It's easy to forget that while many of the US studios have been focusing on DTC over the past five years, BBCS has - aside from ITV Studios joint venture BritBox International - changed relatively little. UKTV remains a bright spot for BBCS in the UK, with channels such as Alibi and Dave delivering returns with a diet of library shows and growing originals. Associated streamer, UKTV Play, is also seeing uptick in viewing, and Fussell is adamant that this will continue with increased investment.

There have also been moves into FAST - where BBCS operates 12 US channels - and the metaverse, with a *Frozen Planet II* branded world on Minecraft indicating demand from younger viewers. It reflects the expansive strategy of BBCS under Fussell but also the fast-moving landscape in which it operates.

New platforms will come and go, he says, but be it coproductions or licensing or work for hire, “they are just economic models.”

“The ecosystem will ebb and flow as it always has,” Fussell continues, “but organisations like the BBC and Disney are 100 years old. They know what their audiences are doing.”



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Keeping the sparkle

ITV Studios was recently described as a “crown jewel” by Carolyn McCall amid heated M&A speculation. Richard Middleton talks strategy, M&A and next moves to ITVS CEO Julian Bellamy



ITV STUDIOS HAS PROVIDED some much-needed spark for its commercial broadcast parent over recent years, as the allure of linear networks dim and the potential afforded by global production shines ever brighter.

So perhaps it's no surprise that ITVS CEO Carolyn McCall recently described the production and distribution division – which spans some 60 companies in 13 countries – as a “crown jewel” of its operations.

Whether or not ITV Studios will join the ongoing consolidation trend remains to be seen but for CEO Julian Bellamy, it's not what keeps him up at night. “The thing I worry about above all else is narrowing the odds of coming up with more hit shows and attracting the very best talent,” he tells TBI.

The strategy to do that was revealed at the end of 2021 and revolves around three key pillars: expanding scripted; growing formats; and expanding ITVS's business with streamers.

It's resulting in an evolution of sorts: ITVS revenues have moved from being around 70/30 in favour of unscripted to around 60/40 today and Bellamy says the aim is to “close that gap” to parity.

No surprise, then, that he is bullish on scripted and says the company is “well on track” to achieve its ambition of quadrupling drama from the 100-hours produced in 2019/20 by 2026. ITVS might not have been as acquisitive as some of its Europe-based rivals, but it has made some big, and canny, plays – most notably by securing Nicola Shindler and her Quay Street Productions on the drama front in 2021.

“You can see the fruits of the investments we made coming

through now, with *Nolly* for Quay Street – that is the first of several dramas coming down the line from Nicola.”

Other deals that have seen ITVS provide incubation to talent – as opposed to direct takeovers – including the partnership with former Bad Wolf exec David P. Davis, whose 5 Acts Productions now sits under Patrick Spence's studio, and Dominic-Treadwell-Collins' Happy Prince.

And while that trio might all be UK-based, Bellamy says demand for European drama remains “pretty strong”, providing opportunities for labels including Tetra Media in France and Italy's Cattleya, which is behind *Django* for Sky and Canal+.

Bellamy points specifically to France and its moves to regulate local streamer spending as one reason why the current slowdown of content investment might not bite as deeply as some have predicted. “All of that is driving quite a vibrant market overall,” he says, but admits that being at the “premium end” of the business helps.

That's not to say per episode spend has to be huge, however. “Brilliant drama is a function of budget, just look at *Happy Valley* – it's hardly *Game Of Thrones* [in budget terms],” he adds, highlighting how European drama producers might find growth amongst the cuts.

“There's also a bifurcation of the market – the producers that will flourish are going to increasingly come from the premium end of the market,” he says, because they have “the best relationships with talent and the best ideas that can command the best offers and prices. You're relying on your own creative chops and the ability to operate at that end of the market.”

Which takes us neatly onto factual and ITVS's “new flank”, as Bellamy describes it, largely powered by the \$126m acquisition of Plimsoll Productions. Joining fellow ITVS label Oxford Scientific Films, Bellamy says the Plimsoll deal was the result of ambitions to tap into the “real opportunity” around premium factual.

“There's enduring appetite over the medium term for very special, high-quality factual storytelling that feels intrinsically global in its nature – and that's what natural history does.”

It has also been an area of interest for streamers and the tie-ins with Plimsoll are clear: it produced *Tiny World* for Apple TV+ and has *Giant World* in the works, while Netflix ordered *Night On Earth*. Other shows, such as *Hostile Planet*, are now available on Disney+ having been commissioned by Nat Geo.

Such activity should help ITVS achieve its goal of driving streamer revenue from around 16% in 2021 to 25% by 2026, despite the current cooling of demand, and Bellamy reiterates that the spending cuts aren't as ubiquitous as some might believe.

“There's not a week goes by without yet another story detailing change, evolution and consolidation, particularly in the US. But take a step back and there is still a very big opportunity here and



ITV Studios is seeing strong demand for European drama, with titles such as *Django* emerging via its Italian label Cattleya

our plan has always been about growing market share,” he says, highlighting that while Disney is cutting around \$3bn from its spend, Netflix is holding steady and Apple TV+ spend is rising.

There is also more opportunity for ITVS to retain rights and Bellamy sees it as a situation that can work for all concerned.

“The messages coming out of global streamers suggest there will be more appetite for [co-productions] as companies seek profitability. It’s a win-win if we avoid leaving value on the table.”

Then there’s formats, with ITVS flagship *The Voice* – acquired via its £355m (equivalent to \$531m in 2015) deal for Talpa Media – now into 73 markets.

“Even though there is so much buzz around scripted, there is still nothing as powerful as an entertainment hit in the content business,” Bellamy says. “There are two parts – protecting and growing and nourishing the big brands, and then doing everything we can to launch new formats.”

The ambition is to increase the number of shows produced in three or more countries from 16 in 2021 to 20 by 2026, with entertainment also being supported by considerable digital pushes.

Whether streamers will increase revenue via format deals as they

look to push dollars further remains to be seen, but there have been few deals yet.

Bellamy says, however, that the key element of his role is to avoid being “knee jerk” amid the current clamour around spending corrections.

“You have to tune out the noise to some degree and see the long game. Look at all the apocalyptic commentary around the initial Netflix correction on share price a while back [Netflix’s share price fell to \$166 in June] and look at them today [\$344 at press time].

“You have to take a step back and think, they are still spending \$17bn on content – there is still a huge opportunity there. And every streamer has different goals.

“The challenge is more around the turbulence and change – execs will reorganise and there will be changes to budget spend, and then you have delays in budget spending and that can be a challenge for producers. But to counter that you have to rely on undeniable ideas and talent. That, in the end, will punch through and get decisions made.”



Playing the field

Banijay COO Peter Langenberg tells Richard Middleton how his company is balancing genres, budgets and M&A activity amid the shifting strategies of streamers



IN A RAPIDLY CONSOLIDATING INDUSTRY, Banijay’s appetite for M&A has arguably been greater than any of its rivals over the past three years.

Since swallowing Endemol Shine Group in 2020, the French group has retained its acquisitive streak, most recently picking up Australia’s *Highway Through Hell* and *MythBusters* firm,

Beyond International.

While not a deal on the scale of ESG, it nevertheless underlines how Banijay – now a publicly floated firm via FL Entertainment – is looking to play the market. “About 75% of our revenue is unscripted with 25% scripted and that balance now feels right,” says Banijay’s COO Peter Langenberg.

That’s not to say scripted companies haven’t been acquired – *Romulus* producer Grøenlandia Group and *30 Coins* prodco Pokepsie Films were among numerous firms picked up last year – but Langenberg points to the current commissioning climate and points to the fact that drama is “heavier on the financing”.

“We see that the streamers are struggling and looking at consolidation,” he tells TBI. “Some might merge to bring down costs and we’re seeing a lack of clarity on strategy.” Among recent moves from US-based giants, it was perhaps HBO Max’s exit from swathes of Europe that caused most furrowed brows across the industry.

Langenberg admits it was “a big thing for us” and says streamer strategies as a whole remain unclear. “You see markets where they are holding back on commissions, maybe not as much on the acquisitions but certainly on the originals, and they are tending to be very conservative as they try to get strategy in order.”

The Banijay veteran also points to senior exec changes and “vacancies in the chain of command” that further muddy the waters. “Ultimately it comes down to a show level, at which it is difficult to find out if and when they might commission or re-commission.”

A “stabilising” of spend has occurred, he adds, but there are other shifts such as Netflix discussing new price points, “which is different” from what came before, Langenberg says.

“But there is definitely more flexibility on rights when you talk to the streamers. They also understand that if they lower their price points they can’t ask us to work for hire. Our preferred position is to produce and keep rights, of course, and the streamers are more willing to discuss a return of rights now, linear especially.”

While high-cost scripted might be a tough sell at present, the price point on docs “are certainly good,” the COO says. “They are comparable to scripted and reality is also doing really well, those are areas we are investing in.” Recent launches have included Netflix’s Idris Elba-fronted *Human Playground*, from Netherlands-based Scenery and UK firm Workerbee, highlighting increasing links between group producers.

And then there are the veterans of the format world and their



Documentary productions such as the Netflix title *Human Playground* are among the type of content that Banijay is currently investing in

ongoing sales, such as ITV’s rebooting of *Big Brother* and the BBC’s remake of *Survivor*, offering reduced risk to clients. But shiny floor studio shows are also ticking up, Langenberg adds, pointing to *Starstruck* and *Lego Masters* as “strong performers” and still enjoying some of the co-viewing trends that emerged through the pandemic.

There is also increasing coordination between Banijay’s major markets, notably the US and the UK, as Stateside operators – both streamers and networks – look for cost-efficient productions.

“[Clients] might see if they can produce in Europe, which happens now and again, and our US and UK teams work closely together. Ben Samek in the US and [UK chief] Patrick Holland are in constant touch to make sure we are aligned,” Langenberg adds. It is also looking increasingly likely that opportunities from the US will grow as the

impending US writers’ strike shows little sign of abating.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Holland has been handed a £50m (\$60m) fund to “supercharge growth” over the next three years, with a remit to support up-and-coming businesses and existing labels.

It’s a move that makes sense in the highly consolidated UK market and will be focused on scripted, reality, docs and fact-ent genres. It will also sit in addition to Banijay’s existing M&A activity, which is also expanding its scope.

“We are looking at companies that shoulder with our content production businesses, so that could be gaming or focused on facilities in post or studio,” explains Langenberg, pointing to the 2022 launches of Banijay Studios Brasil and the deal for Austria-based influencer firm Influence.Vision.

It reflects a theme across the group, with ambitions expanding. Banijay Rights – home to more than 150,000 hours of shows since the Beyond addition – has launched its own branded FAST channels and Langenberg describes the medium as a “growing business” for the distribution arm.

Horizons, which offers shows such as *Gunpowder* and *8 Out Of 10 Cats*, even touts a ‘Powered By Banijay’ strapline, a telling sign for a company that has previously made few if any DTC moves.

While expansive moves might be on the cards for Banijay’s existing business, Langenberg says 2023 will see increased acquisition activity across the sector as

companies scale up. He declines to comment on recent reports linking his company’s holding firm, FL Entertainment, with a move for ITV Studios but streamer consolidation is likely, the COO says. Clearly, appetite for M&A across the industry is not sated yet.



Acquisitive ambitions

Fremantle’s COO & Continental Europe CEO Andrea Scrosati tells Richard Middleton about his company’s acquisition streak, the importance of local productions and positive signs from streamers



WITH A REVENUE TARGET of €3bn (\$3bn) to hit by 2025, Fremantle has been gunning on all fronts over the past 18 months.

Its latest deal came in the form of a minority stake in US comic book publisher/producer Artists, Writers & Artisans (AWA), with projects including a thriller based on the *Devil’s Highway* IP in the works.

Such activity underlines Fremantle’s growing range and follows a succession of high-profile stakes taken in prodcos around the world. These range from *Normal People*’s UK producer Element Pictures to Italian veteran Lux Vide (*Devils*, *Leonardo*), Australia’s Eureka Productions (*Finding Magic Mike*) and 72 Films, among numerous others.

Yet the influx of so much production capability is coinciding

with a period of cooling demand, at least from streamers, but Andrea Scrosati, COO & Continental Europe CEO, tells TBI he continues to see opportunity against slower spending.

“There is a [spending] trend in this direction, but a lot of this is due to macro-economic headwinds such as inflation, recession, negative stock performances. When these change direction – and we are seeing some positive signs – then we will rapidly go back to a more bullish approach from global streamers in content spend,” he predicts.

Moreover, Scrosati says that even in the current climate there remains a focus on “locally oriented productions in key growth markets”, and it is this area that the RTL Group-owned firm – with its 24-country footprint – is looking to tap. There is also the potential of increased work resulting from the looming US writers strike, providing further opportunity.

And streamer strategies that lean into cost-efficient production



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are also tending to turn away from global rights deals. Scrosati says he is seeing “some flexibility on rights, especially for locally originated projects where there is need for gap funding”, with companies “willing to give up rights in some territories to allow for this to happen.”

There are, however, higher costs to deal with, particularly in scripted, and Fremantle is looking to invest across the production process to insulate itself in future. The COO points to Lux Vide’s experiences of bringing “the entire value chain in-house: from writing, to studios production, to post-production and delivery.”

Scrosati also believes Fremantle’s independent set-up (putting aside parent company RTL’s networks) means his company is well placed as M&A ticks up. “The consolidation happening across the market provides us with an opportunity as an independent studio to reach out to new talent and secure new IP,” he says.

“Talent is looking for a partner who is focused on their creative vision and that is perhaps not vertically integrated with a distribution platform, because this will guarantee that each project goes to the right home,” he says.

The result of this strategy is a dizzying amount of scripted series, including a pair of *Bosch* spin-offs recently put into development for Amazon, which come from Fremantle-backed Fabel Entertainment in the US. But the company is also home to *This England* producer Passenger and UK indie Dancing Ledge, which was behind *The Responder* for the BBC, while investing in start-ups is also key.

Despite this focus, formats remain a mainstay for the group and while new IP has emerged – such as *Amor Con Fianza* from Fremantle’s Spanish team – it is shows such as *Got Talent* that provide a reliable source of revenue when risk aversion from commissioners is high.

“Our Global CEO Jen Mullin always says, protecting and growing our entertainment IP is a fundamental part of our strategy. Our creative leadership does that constantly; investing in this sector, innovating our formats to be sure they are always updated to the society we live in, the culture, the technology, the opportunities,” Scrosati says.

He adds that opportunities are emerging, such as *Italia’s Got Talent* moving to Disney+. “It’s the first time in Europe that the format will be available on a streaming platform and underlines the sophistication of audiences and the evolving way in which they want to view their favourite content,” he claims.

“It also shows how popular these formats still are and how unscripted entertainment is becoming a key component of the streamers offer,” the exec adds, pointing to Netflix hit *Too Hot To Handle*, from UK labels Talkback and Thames.

Scrosati is also looking to tap into the increasingly deep pockets of documentary commissioners, an area that has blossomed over recent years as buyers see their flagship potential. Acquisitions include Wildstar Films, Israel’s Silvio Productions and 72 Films, the UK prodco behind Amazon Prime Video’s *All Or Nothing: Arsenal* and its upcoming James Bond-themed gameshow.

Former BBC Storyville chief Mandy Chang was hired in 2021 to oversee this factual expansion and Scrosati says the genre is a key focus of its growth plan, with an expectation that the 52



An adaptation of the comic *Devil’s Highway* is one of Fremantle’s most recent scripted shows in development, following its minority stake in publisher AWA

original docs delivered in 2022 will be exceeded this year.

“This is also part of our portfolio strategy,” Scrosati adds, with the capability ensuring Fremantle can be “a 360° supplier of content across all genres” but also home for talent that wants to experiment across genres. “More and more you see talent moving from a drama project, to a movie, to a documentary and we want them to know that they can always do it with us.”

While production has boomed during the current M&A drive, Scrosati is quick to point to the expanding repertoire across digital platforms, too. Social integration has long been part of the play to build audiences around shows such as *The X Factor*, *Idols* and *Got Talent*, but the company is also YouTube’s biggest supplier of “professional TV content”. It offers 1,500 channels, claiming 476 million subscribers and 286 billion lifetime views.

“We are always looking at where our audiences are and testing new ways of reaching them. For example with Euston Films’ recent drama *Wreck*, when it launched on BBC Three, we also launched a Fortnite integration where players could step into the world of the show.”

While these new avenues of exploration provide growth potential, Scrosati is realistic about the widely predicted consolidation that will affect the sector and reduce routes to market.

“We will see more and more aggregation opportunities offered to costumers,” he says, “it is simply unsustainable to think that families will pay for so many subscriptions individually.”

The hope is that Fremantle’s growing footprint will give it serious clout but also leave it nimble enough to capitalise on both local and global opportunities. **TBI**



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London TV Screenings 2023

Our comprehensive guide to what is happening, where and when during London TV Screenings week

Monday 27 February

BBC Studios Showcase

Time: 2pm - 5pm
Venue: Odeon Luxe, Leicester Square, WC2H 7LQ
Genre(s): Scripted, Factual, Fact Ent & Formats

Tuesday 28 February

Newen Connect London Screenings

Time: 8.45am - 12pm
Venue: Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH
Genre(s): Drama

Viaplay Content Distribution Showcase

Time: 9am - 12pm
Venue: Charlotte Street Hotel, 15-17 Charlotte Street, W1T 1RJ
Genre: Scripted, Unscripted

BBC Studios Showcase

Time: 11am - 2pm
Venue: Odeon Luxe, West End, Leicester Square, WC2H 7DX
Genre(s): Scripted, Factual, Fact Ent & Formats

DCD Rights & Hat Trick International

Time: 4.30pm - 8pm
Venue: Picturehouse Central, W1D 7DH
Genre(s): Drama, Factual

Abacus Media Rights Drinks Reception & Drama Screening

Time: 7pm - 9pm
Venue: Charlotte Street Hotel, 15-17 Charlotte Street, W1T 1RJ
Genre(s): Unscripted, Scripted

Paramount Global Content Distribution Cocktail Party

Time: 6:30pm-8:30pm

Venue: Haymarket Hotel, Suffolk Place, SW1Y 4HX

Wednesday 1 March

Red Arrow Studios International Screening

Time: 9am - 10.30am
Venue: Covent Garden Hotel, 10 Monmouth St, WC2H 9HB
Genre(s): Formats

Banjay At Bafta

Time: 9am - 12pm
Venue: Bafta, 195 Piccadilly, W1J 9LN
Genre(s): Scripted, Unscripted, Formats

Fifth Season at London Screenings

Time: 9am - 12pm
Venue: Ham Yard Hotel, 1 Ham Yard, W1D 7DT
Genre(s): Scripted, Formats, Factual

ITV Studios Festivals

Time: 12pm - 2.00pm (Formats)
 1.30pm - 2.45pm (Unscripted)
 2.45pm - 7.15pm (Drama)
Venue: Odeon Luxe, Leicester Square, WC2H 7LQ
Genre(s): Formats, Unscripted, Scripted

Keshet International's Drama Event & Screening

Time: 12pm - 2pm
Venue: Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH
Genre(s): Drama

Passion Distribution Showcase

Time: 4pm - 6.30pm
Venue: The Groucho Club, W1D 4QB
Genre(s): Factual, Entertainment, Documentary

TVF International

Time: 5pm - 8pm
Venue: Icetank Studios, 5-7 Grape St, WC2H 8DW
Genre(s): Unscripted

About Premium Content's Screening & Cocktail

Time: 6pm - 8pm,
Venue: The Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH
Genre(s): Scripted

BossaNova & Eccho Rights Cocktail Party

Time: 7pm - 10pm
Venue: The Century Club, 61-63 Shaftesbury Ave, W1D 6LQ
Genre(s): Unscripted, Scripted

Thursday 2 March

eOne Drama Preview

Time: 9am - 12pm
Venue: Picturehouse Central, W1D 7DH
Genre(s): Drama

WBITVP Formats Showcase

Time: 9am - 12.30pm
Venue: Bafta, 195 Piccadilly, W1J 9LN
Genre(s): Unscripted, Formats

Dogwoof

Time: 11am - 1pm
Venue: The Soho Hotel, 4 Richmond Mews, W1D 3DH
Genre(s): Documentaries

Fox Entertainment Global

Time: 11:30am - 4.30pm
Venue: Charlotte Street Hotel, 15-17 Charlotte Street, W1T 1RJ
Genre: Live Action & Animated Comedy

All3Media International

Upfront

Time: 12.30pm - 5pm
Venue: Odeon Luxe, Leicester Square, WC2H 7LQ
Genre(s): Drama, Formats, Factual

Cineflix Rights London TV Screenings Spring Slate Showcase

Time: 4pm - 7pm
Venue: 100 Wardour Street, W1F 0TL
Genre(s): Scripted, Factual, Formats

Sony Pictures Television Showcase

Time: 5.30pm - 9pm
Venue: Ham Yard Hotel, 1 Ham Yard, W1D 7DT
Genre(s): Scripted, Unscripted, (+ LA Screenings slate preview)

Studio Canal Screenings & Reception

Time: 5.30pm - 9pm
Venue: Vue West End, 3 Cranbourn St, WC2H 7AL
Genre(s): Scripted

Blue Ant International Cocktail

Time: 6pm - 9pm
Venue: Dean Street Townhouse, 69-71 Dean Street, W1D 3SE
Genre(s): Factual

Friday 3 March

Fremantle Presents 2023

Time: 9am - 12pm
Venue: Bafta, 195 Piccadilly, W1J 9LN
Genre(s): Drama, Factual, Formats

*Check with organisers as events may be invitation only

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Waterloo 

About Premium Content
1 March
6pm-8pm

Blue Ant
2 March
6pm-9pm

Fox
2 March
11.30am-4.30pm

Viaplay Content Distribution
28 February
9am-12pm

TVF Int'l
1 March
5pm-8pm

Dogwoof
2 March
11am-1pm

Abacus Media Rights
28 February
7pm-9pm

Red Arrow Studios Int'l
1 March
9am-10.30am

Keshet International
1 March
12pm-2pm

Newen
28 February
8.45am-12pm

Passion Distribution
1 March
4pm-6.30pm

Charlotte Street Hotel

icetank Studios

Dean Street Townhouse

Covent Garden Hotel

Soho Hotel

Groucho Club

Cineflix Rights
2 March
4pm-7pm

Studio Canal
2 March
5.30pm-9pm

100 Wardour Street

Ham Yard Hotel

Century Club

Odeon Luxe Leicester Sq

All3Media Int'l
2 March
12.30pm-5pm

Fifth Season
1 March
9am-12pm

Sony Pictures TV
2 March
5.30pm-9pm

Vue West End

Picturehouse Central

Odeon Luxe West End

BAFTA

DCD Rights & Hat Trick Int'l
28 February
4.30pm-8pm

ITV Studios
1 March
Formats: 12pm-2pm
Unscripted: 1.30pm-2.45pm
Drama: 2.45pm-7.15pm

Banijay
1 March
9am-12pm

WBITVP Formats
2 March
9am-12.30pm

Haymarket Hotel

eOne Drama
2 March
9am-12pm

BossaNova & Eccho Rights
2 March
7pm-10pm

Fremantle
3 March
9am-12pm

Paramount
28 February
6.30pm-8.30pm

BBC Studios
27 February, 2pm-5pm, Odeon Luxe, Leicester Sq
28 February, 11am-2pm Odeon Luxe West End

The show goes on

One year into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mark Layton investigates how producers and broadcasters in the country have kept cameras rolling and what the global industry can do to support them





One contestant on *The Voice Of The Country* finale received permission to leave the battlefield to participate

It has been one year since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since February 2022, tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions more have been displaced, while the damage to lives and infrastructure has been staggering.

While Ukrainians are fighting tooth and nail to defend their country, its media and entertainment industry is similarly clinging to existence, creating and broadcasting new programming – not only to give viewers a distraction from the conflict, but to share the reality of the war with the rest of the world.

As Oleksandr Bohutskyi, CEO of Kyiv-based broadcast group Starlight Media, tells TBI: “The victory of Ukraine is a goal that unites everyone now: the government, businesses, past competitors, people within media companies and our viewers, Ukraine itself and our allies. We know that our army is doing its best at the front to bring the victory closer and we have to work, create and inform every day to support them and the country on this path.”

Starlight Media is the biggest broadcast group in Ukraine, with holdings including STB, the comcaster that broadcasts local versions of global formats such as *MasterChef*, *Got Talent* and *The Bachelor*.

It has so far survived the conflict, but not all businesses have. In the early days of the invasion, broadcaster funding was suspended – with no advertising, came no possibility of commissioning new content – not to mention the disruption caused by the more immediate threat of missile attacks.

Among the casualties was Media Group Ukraine, once one of the country’s biggest media holdings, which by July 2022 had completely shut down, ceasing broadcast of more than 10 channels, including FTA network Ukrayina and OTT platform OLL.TV.

Balancing content & combat

However, some broadcasters have now returned to a position that just months ago seemed almost unthinkable – they are able to commission new content, albeit on much smaller budgets.

STB has resumed production on titles including culinary format *MasterChef* as well as detective drama *The Trace*. A new series of the latter, ordered in Autumn 2022, is currently filming for debut later this year, while 20 episodes commissioned prior to the invasion premiered on the channel this month.

The Trace is produced by Space Production, which is also behind the STB docudrama series *The Blind*. The firm’s founder and producer Daria Leygonie-Fialko tells TBI that limited budgets have been far



from Space's most-pressing concerns. Almost all of the firm's 2022 shoots coincided with the beginning of attacks on the Ukrainian energy infrastructure, forcing them to film under a partial blackout.

"We started to get to grips with all kinds of generators. Sirens were sounding all the time, which meant that right in the middle of filming [we] stopped and ran to the bomb shelter."

Meanwhile, many of the cast and crew on productions industry-wide have fled the country or headed to the frontlines: "We have found a way to combine service with filming. Our actor Ruslan Koval, who serves in ZSU (the Armed Forces of Ukraine), came to Kyiv the other day to shoot *The Trace*. After that he will be back to the front to defend Ukraine."

Filming on *The Blind* further highlights the security concerns that production companies currently face in Ukraine, with Space requiring bomb squads to inspect one of the show's primary woodland shooting locations. "We had to check if the forest was booby-trapped," reveals Leygonie-Fialko.

Space is also behind *Art Of War*, a documentary co-production with Germany's Broadview and the Organisation of Ukrainian Producers (OUP), which debuted on French-German broadcaster Arte in February.

The OUP was founded in March 2022 to support both scripted and documentary projects about the invasion and to spread personal stories about the conflict worldwide. Initially funded by investment from its founders – one of which is Space – proceeds are re-invested into the creation of new films, while co-production partners are sought for more complex projects, such as *Art Of War*.

The Blind (above) and *The Trace* (below, right) are both dramas produced by Space Production, which has returned to filming

Documenting the conflict

Ukraine's former minister of culture, Volodymyr Borodyansky, another co-founder of the OUP, tells TBI its mission is "to document and open the eyes of the world to the truth about the war in Ukraine" and its documentary output has been impressive.

"In 10 months, we have made 12 films, including one feature film," reveals Borodyansky. "In the coming months, as a producer, I hope to finish five documentaries, six months later another, *Evolution Of Propaganda*, and launch several new shows."

Borodyansky says the OUP has focused on documentaries both for being "more in tune with the times" and cheaper to produce than feature films. However, some adjustment was required for many producers and creative professionals more used to working on features or TV series.

Reception to these projects has been encouraging, says Borodyansky: "We showed *Mariupol: Unlost Hope*, a film testimony from Mariupol residents about the first month of the war, in 50+ countries. What we saw and heard from the audience, ordinary people in prosperous countries who have never experienced war, showed us that we are on the right track."

Alla Lypovetska, founder and producer for Mamas Film Production, another OUP co-founder, tells TBI that the past year has been "the worst of our lives."

Issues that would normally take hours to resolve can now take days or weeks, slowing down production considerably, but Mamas has nevertheless adapted. At the time of writing, the firm was completing final post-production on the feature *Stay Online*, while its documentaries *9 Lives* and



HopeBahnhof. Berlin, about the stories of Ukrainian refugees and European volunteers, have been acquired by more than 20 countries.

“We set up three teams to make our films, two making documentaries and one making a full-length feature. Our projects were shot simultaneously in Ukraine, Germany, Sweden and Poland. A number of our colleagues were not in Kyiv and it complicated the process. But the general desire to keep shooting was very stimulating for the team.”

A light in the darkness

For Volodymyr Zavadiuk, head of big shows at broadcast group 1+1 Media, bringing *The Voice Of The Country*, the Ukrainian version of ITV Studios music competition format *The Voice*, back to screens was “more than just a project... [but] a certain mission.”

With the season 12 finale interrupted in spring because of the invasion and having received “an incredible number of requests from viewers [for its] return”, Zavadiuk and his team set out to complete the season, ultimately bringing the show back for a live performance in November, broadcast on 1+1 Media’s TET channel.

Powered by generators, shooting took place in the Maidan Nezalezhnosti metro station, which Zavadiuk explains was a symbolic location as “during the first days of the full-scale war, this station was used as a shelter for thousands of Kyiv natives who were hiding from Russian missile attacks” – many of whom would sing to keep spirits high.

Show presenter Katya Osadcha, who had left Ukraine, agreed to return to film the finale, while the team tracked down participants and showcased how their lives had changed since viewers last saw them.

“It was a big challenge because many of them were also scattered across the globe. The war changed their lives, some lost their homes. All this was done so that both the participants and the audience would not lose faith that light would definitely defeat darkness,” says Zavadiuk.

As has been oft repeated over the past 12 months, what Ukrainian producers need is for distributors to pick up their shows, buyers to order and acquire them, and international companies to strike co-production deals. In short, they want business.

“Ukrainians don’t want just to get money or to participate for free somewhere, Ukrainians want to work and be a fully-fledged part of the international process, and such an opportunity is the most important thing for Ukrainians right now,” says Space Production’s Leygonie-Fialko.



The *Mariupol* series of documentary films explore life in the Ukrainian city while under Russian occupation

“We did not pack our bags and stop, but continue to work in brave Kyiv and produce Ukrainian content”

Volodymyr Zavadiuk
1+1 Media



Starlight Media CEO Bohutskyi, adds that “discounts for the purchase of content for Ukrainian broadcasters are very important now.”

He explains: “Obviously, our production capacity is currently reduced, while audience demand for artistic and entertainment content is only increasing.

“For people, it’s not about entertainment but about a chance to be distracted at least for a few hours, to plunge into a world where the main background is not war. This content now has a new, humanitarian role – psychological and emotional support.”

Bohutskyi also calls for “the rejection of everything Russian.”

He is unequivocal in his stance on anyone still distributing and acquiring Russian content. “All Russians who did not directly oppose the war are complicit in this crime. Continuing co-operation and showing Russian content means tolerating the killing of civilians and the destruction of our cities.”

Meanwhile, the war continues. Just as President Zelenskyy seeks support from international allies, local media leaders look for the same from their counterparts. For the time being, they are going nowhere. As 1+1 Media’s Zavadiuk stirringly puts it: “Despite the war, Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities continue to live and develop. They do everything possible for themselves and for victory. But at the same time, they try to relax, fall in love and start new businesses.

“New coffee shops are opening, where people come in-between rocket attacks to drink and chat with each other. [It is] very important for us to show by our own example that during the war we did not pack our bags and stop, but continue to work in brave Kyiv and produce Ukrainian content.” **TBI**

All ears



Nick Edwards investigates what it takes to adapt an audio production for the screen but finds their immense popularity does not necessarily guarantee a development shortcut

Ever since journalist Sarah Koenig’s *Serial* demonstrated how the ultra-slow burn, episodic structure of podcasting was perfect for exploring subjects and telling stories in a cinematic and immersive manner, its potential as a tool to fuel TV programming has been clear.

The parallels between long-form narrative podcasting and serialised TV drama or docuseries are obvious and the relationship between the two mediums is becoming increasingly symbiotic.

Marc Smerling, who found fame with groundbreaking HBO documentaries such as *Capturing The Friedmans* and *The Jinx*, stumbled across podcasting when he decided he wanted to explore how corruption and mob rule had shaped the American city of Providence, Rhode Island.

“But you couldn’t sell it to television then,” he says, “you couldn’t even explain it as a TV show in a way that people would understand.”

Podcasting allowed him to drill deeper until all the pieces of the jigsaw fitted together. “I killed myself for two years, but once I started I realised how much freedom I had,” he says.

Crimetown: Divine Providence became one of the most successful podcasts of all time, clocking up well over 60 million listens. “It’s

been listened to more than any of my TV shows have been watched, including *The Jinx*,” he says.

To keep audience attention, creators have honed the craft of storytelling to the much-celebrated standard of premium scripted drama or docuseries, and sometimes much higher. The shows that constitute America’s much-discussed golden age of TV drama are often celebrated for their episodic, novel-like qualities, but serialised narrative podcasts (that often run to over 20 episodes) are arguably a closer comparable.

And, says Steve Carsey, MD of Fremantle-backed podcast studio Storyglass, listeners “don’t have visual cues so it’s more of an intelligent and emotional engagement with the story.”

Yet despite the critical acclaim and huge levels of audience engagement achieved by serialised podcasts, it remains a struggle to find ways to monetise them.

The long haul

While the cost of production is low in comparison to making a TV show – typically anything from \$5,000 - \$50,000 an episode – the workload is immense. Researching, sourcing materials, holding

Opposite, Hulu drama *The Dropout* was adapted from the ABC News podcast of the same name, which became the first production from Searchlight Television

interviews, preparing scripts, sound design and producing can easily take 12 months of work, or more.

There are also legal costs to consider, particularly in the medium's driving genre, true crime. Highly sensitive material relating to victims, the accused and/or previously undisclosed information may all be involved.

However, get it right, and selling the IP can prove to be a very lucrative method of recouping your investment.

"If you can get one [TV show] made, it can cover [the cost] of three or four podcasts," says Smirling, who is president of US-based Truth Media.

Apple, which recently dropped Smirling's latest long-form podcast *Operation: Tradebom*, is adapting *Firebug* – an earlier Truth Media production – into a scripted TV series. Dennis Lehane and the team responsible for Apple TV+'s 2022 miniseries *Black Bird* are behind the show.

"That will probably support the whole business," says Smirling. *Firebug* will also add to the trickle of narrative podcast adaptations, of which Peacock's *Dr Death* (based on the Wondery podcast), Hulu's *The Dropout* (ABC News), Apple TV+'s *WeCrashed* (Wondery), Amazon Prime Video's *Homecoming* (Gimlet Media) and *Dirty John* (Wondery/LA Times) are amongst the most famous.

Sums & parts

For most audio production companies, longform serialised narrative podcasts are just one part of their businesses, often sitting alongside creating weekly or daily podcasts, and making audio for, or collaborating with, outside partners or brands.

Though the industry mantra is always 'audio first', many companies now produce serialised podcasts with a view to selling the IP as TV series or features.

Within the Bertelsmann Group (owner of production and distribution giant Fremantle), Storyglass is able to produce "podcasts as an internal IP incubation strategy," says Carsey, who was previously senior director for international English (originals) at Audible, where he managed content strategy and greenlit more than 200 podcasts. Storyglass is aided in its strategy by working with fellow Bertelsmann company and publishing giant Penguin Random House, with ambitions for three-way book, screen and audio collaborations.

"Producers are recognising that podcasting is a great proving ground for stories and characters. When we approach a story, we are looking for those beats, those structural hooks that will keep the audience engaged and propel them from one episode, or moment, to the next," says Carsey.

Podcasts can also work as enhanced pitches, he adds. "They can weather the audience reception and structurally they show how to tell the story," Carsey continues.

This has obvious advantages over "a paper proposal or a three-minute sizzle reel and is a far more affordable way to test ideas than

making a full-blown pilot," the former Audible man adds.

The cost-efficient potential of podcasts has also lured others into the space, with Lionsgate last year launching a dedicated division and Sony backing The Binge, a podcast channel that specialises in true crime and docuseries.

The blurring lines between audio and TV also saw audio giant Spotify tap former Paramount executive Julie McNamara to be its head of US studios & video in 2021, while venture capital firms have dipped toes into the water. Novel, the UK podcast studio (and part of the UTA Group), which made *The Emerald Triangle*, recently secured £5m (\$6.2m) from growth capital investor VGC Partners, with a view to establishing originals as well adapting podcast IP into TV and film projects.

Cautionary tales

Whilst activity around the podcasting sector has grown, the route to profitability for creators remains uncertain. Spotify recently cut its investment in podcasting and anyone who sees dollar signs at the idea



Operation: Tradebom hails from Apple, and Novel is behind *The Emerald Triangle*, while *False Profit\$* from Storyglass details a personal journey for the investigators

of adapting podcasts into TV and film deals should exercise an extreme degree of caution.

“To suggest you could just lift the audio directly and translate it to TV without another level of development would be inaccurate,” says Carsey. “We might need to bring in script editors or showrunners to make it work for TV, and it might require different POVs, more characters, and so on.”

“I’m extremely bespoke and intentional with how we approach any film & TV opportunity for our projects,” says Neil Krishnan, head of film and TV at Novel. He was first introduced to the podcast firm when he worked at NBCUniversal covering IP acquisitions and 200+ talent deals for its TV studios.

“Who do we want to send it to, when do we want to share materials, how do we want to present the opportunity? The absolute goal is a perfect creative fit and always working hand-in-hand with our podcast team,” he adds.

And it is worth bearing in mind that serialised podcasts are frequently passion projects. “Authored stories, often anchored in personal experience,” is how Carsey, describes them.

For example, what differentiates Storyglass’s *Fal\$e Profit\$: Hillsong* – an investigation into corruption and coercion in a mega church that dropped this February – is the personal journey of the investigators. An emotional connection with the listener is often a core element of podcasting IP.

“It’s my absolute priority to make sure any adaptation retains the flame of what it was, even if it’s transmuted into a different medium”

Neil Krishnan,
Novel



were adapting a book or a magazine article that also has no visual material. For example, police interview tapes that may have provided great audio on a podcast would still have to be recreated visually for a documentary or a scripted series.

Likewise, it may be challenging or indeed impossible to reconvene the podcast’s original interviewees, who may have disclosed very personal or traumatic information and who may not wish to revisit that period of their lives. They may not want to be recognised and – as any true crime fan knows – they may well be incarcerated, or even dead.

This can make scripted sometimes a better fit. One of the most celebrated narrative podcasts of 2022 was *The Superhero Complex*, Novel’s exploration into the world of spandex clad vigilante crimefighters. It features an ensemble of characters and a very contemporary anti-hero who embarks on a classic, cinematic hero’s journey.

There are other unseen benefits in collaborating with podcast producers, too. “Referring to our podcasts as purely ‘IP’ doesn’t capture the full picture of their value,” says Krishnan. “Our brilliant producers and creative partners have so much more research and context that even the most thorough podcast can’t capture. And the folks we work with in the film & TV space are able to access and engage with all of that.”

“The projects we’re developing can stay very close to the structure of the podcast, others can keep the spirit but vary wildly,” he continues. “But it’s my absolute priority to make sure any adaptation retains the flame of what it was, even if it’s transmuted into a different medium. We and any creative partners must feel proud and elated by any adaptation that gets made.”

Bottom line

And yet for all the buzz, it is telling that only a couple of dozen serialised narrative podcasts have successfully been flipped from audio to screen (though dozens more are likely to be at various stages of development).

Though Hollywood has recognised the value of the IP residing in podcasts, not a lot are getting made.

“Right now is a very difficult time in Hollywood, there are no pitches,” Smerling says, referring to the caution almost all platforms and outlets are exercising in commissioning as they pivot to a more unpredictable economic future and industry landscape.

However, Krishnan, who also worked in finance and then in strategy at Netflix, believes podcasts will remain a key tool.

“There are inevitably going to be changes in the entertainment industry but I strongly believe that brilliant storytelling (and especially those who create it) will always weather any storm.”

And that’s why the old adage that great TV shows start with great writing means serialised narrative podcasts – as IP sources – are likely to become a permanent part of the industry’s infrastructure. **TBI**



Peacock’s crime drama anthology series *Dr Death* was based on the Wonderly podcast of the same name. The streamer has renewed it for a second season

There is also a popular industry misconception that non-fiction narrative podcasts are easily adapted into a TV docuseries. It’s easy to see why: their narrative style, tone and themes often have all the hallmarks of docuseries that have ‘popped’ so well for Netflix (and which are far cheaper to make than scripted) – from *Tiger King* and *Bad Vegan* to *The Tinder Swindler*.

But apart from providing a potential narrative spine and characters, producers are otherwise in the same position they would be if they

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From South African drama to Ukrainian documentary, check out our selection of some of the hottest shows available at market right now

Planet Earth III

Back for a third and final time, the BBC Studios natural history series, narrated – as ever – by Sir David Attenborough, sets out for all corners of our planet, from the depths of the oceans to the most remote jungles, to reveal the untold stories of the animals that live in these environments.

“Each episode showcases new behaviour, pristine environments and the remarkable strategies that animals have developed to survive,” executive producer Mike Gunton and series producer Matt Brandon tell TBI.

But more than that, say the show creators, *Planet Earth III* explores the new challenges that wildlife faces in a changing world where their territory is increasingly encroached upon by human beings.

“The natural world has changed more over the past few decades than ever before and since making the first *Planet Earth* we have begun to better understand the fragility of our home. We’ve now reached a critical point in our planet’s history that demands that the next chapter of *Planet Earth* features stories and animal characters which reflect the new challenges that wildlife faces in our modern, crowded world,” say Gunton and Brandon.

“This change has been felt right across every ecosystem and by the countless creatures that we share this planet with. The series, whilst still retaining the awe, beauty, and warm accessible tone of its predecessors, will bring a new, important insight into our increasingly fragile natural world by revealing the deep interconnectivity of all life on Earth.”

The execs believe *Planet Earth III* has ‘raised the bar’ in natural history storytelling, sharing: “Across the series we’ve filmed in new, previously unseen locations telling stories that are dramatic, thrilling, sometimes funny, sometimes heart-breaking, but always full of hope.”

As for what could pique the interest among international viewers, the answer is simple, say Gunton and Brandon: “*Planet Earth III* has a truly global appeal. We showcase every habitat on Earth, exploring all corners of our amazing planet – no one else is doing that.

“And because we’re covering every piece of this global jigsaw – from the world’s most extreme habitats to forests, freshwater habitats and even our urban world – we can tell stories from that offer a big picture perspective across the planet.”

Producer: BBC Studios Natural History Unit, BBC America, The Open University

Distributor: BBC Studios

Broadcaster: BBC1 (UK)

Logline: Concluding chapter of the natural history series exploring the challenges faced by wildlife in modern, crowded world, from the depths of the oceans to the the most remote jungles







Spinners

Producer: Empreinte Digitale, Natives At Large

Distributor: Studiocanal

Broadcaster: Canal+ (France) Showmax (South Africa)

Logline: A young man turns to the dangerous motor sport of spinning in an effort to escape the life of crime in which he has become trapped

South African drama set around the dangerous motor sport of spinning, where cars are driven at high speed, with those behind the wheel performing daring stunts.

The series follows Ethan (Cantona James), a 17-year-old driver working for a local gang, run with an iron fist by Damien. Trying to support his

younger brother, but increasingly disgusted with this life and constantly on the edge, Ethan discovers a possible way out via spinning, where he could put his driving skills to use.

“Ethan is at a crossroads and must decide which path to take,” reveals Beatriz Campos, Studiocanal’s SVP of global sales and financing. “Forced to do atrocious things by one of

the most dangerous gangs in the neighbourhood and always desperately trying to break away from this life and his past, eventually he will find a family within his new group of friends that will help him chase his dreams,” says the exec.

Expert spinners supervised all the stunts and designed the driving sequences, reveals Campos. “Careful preparation was key but as it always is with spinning, there was room for improvisation while the drivers were behind the steering wheel resulting in spectacular action.”

Campos describes *Spinners* as a “coming-of-age story” that will appeal to the demand for “authentic and organic drama originating in the region”.

She adds: “High-octane and adrenaline-fuelled sport provides an exciting and visually striking layer to this already gripping drama, filmed in the spectacular scenery around Cape Town.”

Strangers On A Plane

Producer: Strawberry Blond TV

Distributor: Hat Trick International

Broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)

Logline: Reality format in which five strangers set out to prove who can organise the best holiday at the same popular destination

Holidays are meant to be a relaxing experience, but this new reality format sees five people sacrifice their downtime by placing their plans into the hands of total strangers.

In this stripped daytime series, five holiday-goers pack their bags for the same popular holiday destination. Once settled, they’ll each take control of an action-packed 24 hours, in a bid to prove they can holiday better than anyone else.

From chaotic dune buggy racing and hilarious beach raves, to stinking youth hostels,

the five travelers battle it out for the week’s grand prize – another five days in the sun with a person of their choice.

“One person’s idea of heaven is another’s hell,” observes Steve Wynne, CEO of show producer Strawberry Blond TV. “We had some strangers spending hardly any money at all on the accommodation and spending it on cocktails. Another decided canyoning would be a brilliant idea – and two of their guests were afraid of heights.”

Understandably there were some “tears and tantrums,”

reveals Wynne. “Some took to it (literally) like a duck to water, others had to be (literally) pushed. Each day, the holiday host gets to see the feedback from their guests – which makes for an interesting week for making friends, but also the cause of arguments.”

Wynne says that the format is inexpensive to produce and “literally travels everywhere” making it ideal for international adaptation. He also notes: “It’s also a really fun series to make. Which production team doesn’t want to spend their days filming on holiday?”





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Against All Odds

Producer: Gingers, Illuminated Content, OUP Documentary

Distributor: Authentic Distribution

Broadcaster: N-TV (Germany)

Logline: Documentary exploring how Ukraine managed to hold out against its Russian invaders during the first months of the conflict

One year on from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this documentary explores how the country managed to withstand the first months of the conflict, despite its much smaller military force and widespread predictions that the capital city, Kiev, would fall in days.

“This is probably the most documented war in the history of mankind,” director Artem Lytvynenko and producer Igor Storckak tell TBI, with the documentary exploring the events of the past 12 months through videos from

smartphones, security cameras and drones, as well as footage handed over by the military.

“There are many videos of war crimes,” reveal the filmmakers, who also interviewed international experts such as William Taylor, the former US ambassador to Ukraine and Andrzej Falkowski, a retired Polish general, to provide an “independent and unbiased assessment” of the conflict.

“No one believed that Ukraine would hold out. Russia is huge, its resources are enormous, and it had the second-largest army

in the world (at least at the time of the invasion). Everything indicated that Ukraine would

fall. But it didn't. Why? How? At what cost? That is what our film is about.”



Phoenix Rise

Producer: BBC Studios Kids & Family Productions

Distributor: Sinking Ship Entertainment

Broadcaster: BBC (UK)

Logline: Teen drama series exploring the realities of modern school life as a group of youngsters learn to find their place in the world



Coming-of-age drama series following a group of students who form an unbreakable bond as they navigate the trials and tribulations of school life.

“Our six navigate the highs and lows of being a teen: first love and its best friend heartbreak, exam pressures, bullying, making – and keeping – friends, confidence issues and anxiety,” reveal show creators Matt Evans and Perrie Balthazar. “Alongside these universal themes we look at how poverty affects many children today through the eyes of Billy, abandoned by his dad and left alone to raise his little sister with no money.

“All our characters are trying to find their place in the world, a journey that doesn't end when we reach 16, but for most of us, our teenage years are when we struggle hardest to find out who we are, what we'll fight for and what we'll fall for.”

The series explores issues such as the impact of social media on teenagers through “a catfishing storyline with devastating consequences” and the difference that a driven teacher can make on young people's lives via head teacher Jamie Stewart.

“As a young black man with a troubled past of his own, he knows what it's like to be on the outside looking in. This drives him to extreme measures to protect the children in his care,” say Evans and Perrie.

“This is a universal story of underdogs and second chances,” adds Kate Sanagan, head of sales at Sinking Ship Entertainment. “In the past few years in particular, kids all over the world have experienced disruption and chaos in their in-person school lives. This show depicts school as a hopeful place, as our characters learn to find their place in the world.”

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The Spring International TV Market - 60th Anniversary

Self-Made

Producer: Moonshot

Distributor: Sony Pictures Television

Broadcaster: Sony Channel (Brazil)

Logline: Entrepreneurs compete for the chance to receive mentorship from industry leaders to help get their new products off the ground

Four entrepreneurs receive a leg up in their careers thanks to the help of some industry experts in this new reality competition format. The aspiring businesspeople get the chance to redevelop and finesse their products across four rounds from the pitch to the result.

Once their product is finally market-ready, the two remaining entrepreneurs re-pitch to the judges for the chance to win a cash prize and entry into a mentorship program, to further ensure their product's success.

Each expert covers "key areas of product development; product insight, market insight and brand design," reveals Laura St Clair, VP of

international formats at Sony Pictures Television. "As the judges of the show, the experts must consider which of the four products presented has the most potential to go to market."

Self-Made launched in Brazil last year where it proved popular with younger viewers on Sony Entertainment's pay-TV channel, says St Clair. "The 18-24 demo made up nearly 40% of the overall viewership and outperformed the average primetime audience of this same group.

"We see a lot of overlap with the audience who love *Shark Tank* – especially with younger audiences who are invested in this feel-good competition that



seeks out the positive stories," she reveals.

St Clair suggests that the *Self-Made* format "speaks to the international cultural shift towards small business start-ups and side-hustles that have thrived in a social-media environment."

The format has a scalable

structure, she adds, and can be adapted for a broad range of areas, depending on a channels requirement: "from the food products of the original Brazilian version to children's toys or the health and wellness industry, there is so much this format can offer to local audiences."

This Town

Producer: Kudos, Nebulastar, Mercury Studios in association with Kudos North, Stigma Films and Nick Angel

Distributor: Banijay Rights

Broadcaster: BBC (UK)

Logline: New Steven Knight drama following a group of young friends whose love of ska and two-tone music brings them together in 1980s Britain

New drama from *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight, telling the story of four young people who are drawn into the world of ska and two-tone music in 1980s Britain.

"The group at the heart of the show come from different backgrounds – from Caribbean heritage, to Coventry's tight-knit Irish community, to skinhead subculture, even from middle class Sutton Coldfield – but all are united by their shared dream of escape from the expectations and pressures

forced on them," Katie McAleese, executive producer at Kudos tells TBI.

The cast includes Michelle Dockery, Nicholas Pinnock and David Dawson, with the show revealing life in the West Midlands of the 1980s: an era of big social and cultural upheaval – from the IRA's presence, to the Handsworth race riots and mass unemployment.

"But within this tumultuous time, [the series] shows how this atmosphere of uncertainty

created a melting pot, and gave rise to a huge amount of creative energy and excitement – and how the creatives and musicians of the time saw the issues around them and were inspired to make something new," says McAleese.

Kudos partnered with Mercury Studios, part of the Universal Music Group, to

bring this musical world to life, with producer Dan Carey, and artist and poet Kae Tempest, creating original songs which will be performed by the band in the series.

Meanwhile, a "range of contemporary high profile artists from across the Universal label" will be contributing to the series, reveals McAleese. **TBI**



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Breeding stories like rabbits

“We’ve become obsessed with the brands, the Hollywood talent, the fashion icons... it’s time to think about the storytelling”

In the west, the new year is well underway and the underground stirrings of spring are bringing a whiff of hope. The east has now also rung in its 2023, so it feels like a good time for some reflection and intention-setting.

As every school child knows, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. I’ve been wondering whether that explains why, here in the lands of the sunset, celebrating the end of things – days, seasons, harvests – is so entrenched in western myth and culture. And that got me thinking that perhaps the time has come for our global TV community to look to the land of the sunrise. Not perhaps to the actual east, but to a metaphorical one.

Under the Chinese Zodiac, we have just leapt out of the year of the tiger, which is associated with bravery, competition, unpredictability and confidence. Sounding familiar? But tiger years are also known to be turbulent – the onset of World War 1 in 1914, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. It’s fair to say that 2022 didn’t disappoint us in that regard: the tumult in Iran and the brutal war in Ukraine, not to mention flood, fire, famine in some parts of the world as our planet fought back.

So now, the Chinese wheel of fortune has spun once more, and we find ourselves in the year of the rabbit. I’m hoping it will also be the year when ‘enough’ is finally seen as the real abundance. When nervously Googling the rabbit’s likely impact on 2023, I was relieved to find words like ‘gentle’, ‘quiet’, ‘elegant’, ‘alert’, as well as ‘quick’, ‘skilful’, ‘kind’, ‘patient’ and ‘responsible’. Rabbits, it transpires, are also nurturers. They take care of their existing possessions and communities, rather than slashing and burning and annexing other people’s warrens. Does it for me.

But what has all this got to with telly? Looking at the TV marketplace after years of aggressive M&As and the relentless harvesting of profit, it seems clear to me that we’ve reached a tipping point. There’s nothing left to consume and harvest. The industry has eaten itself. To quote *Game Of Thrones*, winter has probably already come to us producers and distributors as we struggle to negotiate the over-consolidated marketplace. So maybe it’s time to look to the lands of sunrise for a new dawn. We need to work out what our new story – our new

myth, if you like – should and could be. And not only as an industry, but as a global economy, society and biosphere.

So I’m proposing that we welcome the gentle rabbit into our work lives. Up until now, the media industry has been focused on the bricks and mortar of our fairytale castles of commerce. What’s more, we’ve become obsessed with the bricks: the brands, the Hollywood talent, the fashion icons, the influencers, the A-list producers and directors. But it’s now time to think about the mortar holding everything together – in other words, the storytelling. We humans have a deeply embedded need for stories, not just for comfort and escapism, but also as a means of understanding, connecting and empathising with others. As we are all painfully aware, life as we know is on the brink of collapse, if not extinction. As I write this, for example, The Red Cross has just announced that we remain woefully unprepared for a new pandemic. It doesn’t even bear thinking about.

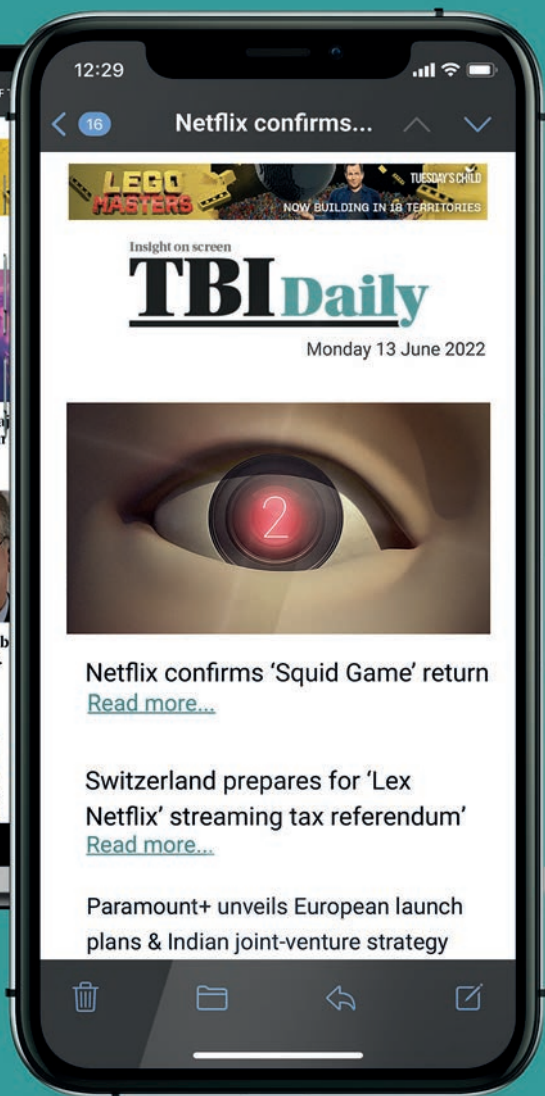
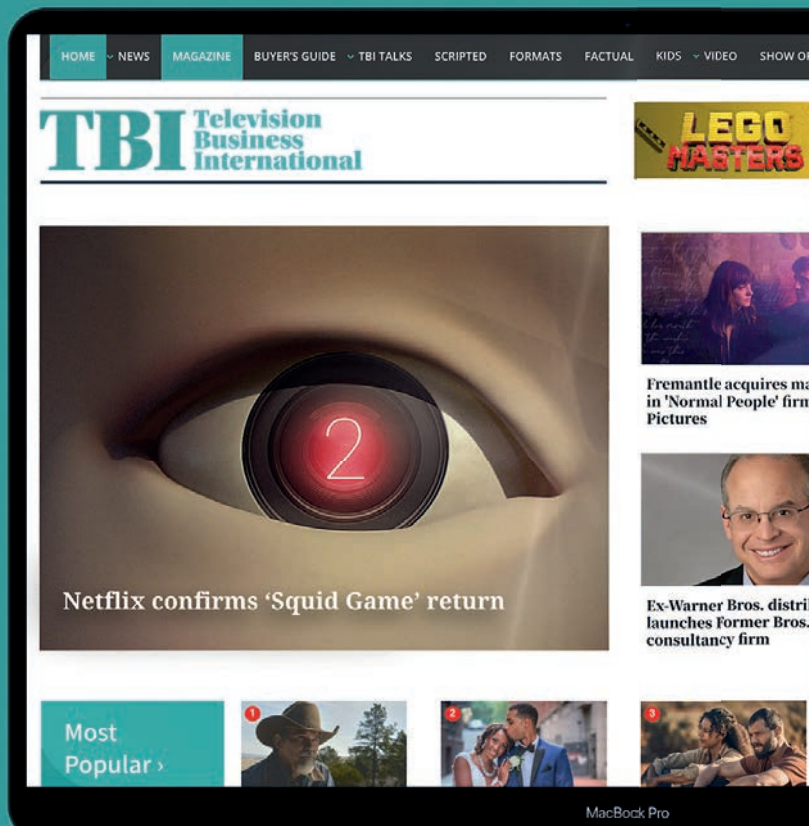
Personally, I’m pinning my faith on our industry’s mortar – our wise and wily storytellers – to help us rebuild for change and glue things back together. I’m not unrealistic, however. Most of us – and I’m no exception – are answerable to commercial masters who are very attached to their bricks. Specifically here I see distribution led studio thinking coming to the forefront, the industry mortar, the yet to be celebrated storytellers that will form the connective tissue for an already fractured industry that is facing a recession.

So this shift will demand that every one of us makes changes, both to the structure of our organisations and in terms of relinquishing some of our perceived ‘power’. And it won’t be easy. Initially, it will seem like we’ve replaced our fairytale castles with crude mud huts. But we need to go back to basics to create a solid foundation on which to build a sustainable future.

So as the sun sets on this era of over-abundance, let’s call on all the storytellers to help us write the new myths we so desperately need to prepare for a new sunrise. It’s a time for new talent, budgets and bravery as we let go of our addiction to growth, profit and greed and embrace riches of a different sort. Forget tigers. You’ll find me down the rabbit hole of storytelling. **TBI**

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