

Big SVOD Players Become Bigger Forces in Film

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

By Michael Malone

Netflix, Amazon are major factors at movie festivals around the world

The big subscription VOD platforms, led by Netflix and Amazon, have slowly but surely been making major moves into original film productions. While the effort has hardly elevated either player to the ranks of elite film producers, the performance by Amazonâ??s *Manchester by the Sea* during awards season â?? it was a Best Picture nominee at the Academy Awards, a first for a film backed by a streaming service â?? showed that the streaming platforms have more than just crafting binge-worthy original TV series on their minds.

â??*Manchester by the Sea* cemented the fact that the SVOD platforms can make movies of that caliber,â?• Tony Gunnarsson, principal analyst at Ovum, a research firm for the digital industry, said. â??They donâ??t have to come from Hollywood studios.â?•

Amazon bought distribution rights to *Manchester* for $10 million. While the film did not get Best Picture, it did take home the Oscars for Best Actor and Best Original Screenplay.

Netflixâ??s Bigger Bet

Despite Amazonâ??s awards success, Netflix has been the most active of the SVOD platforms in terms of producing original films. Speaking at the Producers Guild of Americaâ??s Produced By Conference in Los Angeles earlier this month, Netflix chief content officer Ted Sarandos drew a reaction from the crowd when he revealed that the service currently has 40 original movies in the works. Some of Netflixâ??s higher-profile original films include the prison documentary *13th*; Brad Pittâ??s *War Machine*, which Netflix paid $60 million for, according to published reports; war drama *Beasts of No Nation*; Martin Scorseseâ??s *The Irishman*, which starts shooting this summer; and an eight-movie deal with Adam Sandler.

Okja, which made a stir last month at the Cannes Film Festival, starts streaming on Netflix June 28.

Amazonâ??s original film ambitions have been more modest. In July 2015, it acquired Spike Leeâ??s *Chi-Raq*, which debuted in February 2016 as the streaming platformâ??s first original movie. Early last year, Amazon acquired six films at the Sundance Film Festival. At this yearâ??s Sundance, it shelled out $12 million for distribution rights to rom com *The Big Sick.*

Hulu, meanwhile, has been producing documentaries for its original films. Those include *Becoming Bond*, about Australian actor George Lazenbyâ??s unlikely rise to playing James Bond in the 1969 film *On Her Majestyâ??s Secret Service*.

None of those three SVOD players would speak for this story.

Amazon and Netflix have emerged as forces at the various film festivals around the world. â??Netflix and Amazon are in the movie business,â?• Assembly Entertainment CEO Christina Wayne said at the recent *B&C* and *Multichannel News* Next TV Summit. â??They are at the festivals, out-buying everybody.â?•

Industry insiders mostly see it as a smart strategy. Original productions better define a programmer than acquired ones, they said, and theyâ??re typically cheaper, too. â??You make more money when you make your own movie than when you get the rights to a third-party Hollywood movie,â?• Gunnarsson said. â??Those are quite expensive.â?•

Netflixâ??s production costs in 2017 are around $6 billion, and Amazonâ??s $4.5 billion.

Television has started to rival film in terms of prestige in recent years, evident in the many film luminaries working in TV, such as Anthony Hopkins starring in HBOâ??s *West-world* and Woody Allen making *Crisis in Six Scene*s for Amazon. Yet film still offers a certain degree of glamour.

â??I think it makes absolute sense,â?• said Dave Smith, CEO of media consultancy SmithGeiger, of the streamersâ?? moves into film production. â??Itâ??s a brand extension into original programming, and it gets you into film, which is seen as the highest level in the entertainment paradigm.â?•

It also might mean prestigious film awards, which are good for the brand, Smith added.

Bigger Content, Smaller Screens

SVOD servicesâ?? moves into original films come as viewers get more used to consuming longer-form content on smaller screens. Long-form content â?? which software company Ooyala defines as more than 20 minutes in length â?? represents 65% of viewing on computers, up from 35% a year before, and 55% of viewing on smartphones, up from 29% a year before.

The SVOD players have very different approaches to making their film offerings stand out. Amazon appears more willing to have its films offered for traditional theatrical release before they turn up on SVOD, which can mean a mighty marketing push for a film before it ends up on Amazon.

Bob Berney, head of marketing and distribution at Amazon Studios, addressed theater owners at CinemaCon last year, reassuring them the six films it acquired at Sundance would get theatrical releases â?? and aggressive marketing strategies.

Netflix movies donâ??t spend as much time on the big screen. *War Machine*, for one, had a limited theatrical release in New York and Los Angeles. Netflix took some heat at the Cannes Film Festival last month related to theatrical releases. Pedro AlmodÃ³var, head of the festival jury, said Netflix movies that wonâ??t be in theaters should not be eligible to win the Palme dâ??Or prize. When the Netflix film *Okja* premiered at Cannes, the Netflix logo on screen at the start of the film got a lusty boo out of the crowd.

But it appears both SVOD players are in the film business for the long term. As Christina Wayne sees it, such platforms are expanding to reflect the publicâ??s love for TV series, talk shows, childrenâ??s programming, movies and whatever else they wish to watch. â??Itâ??s going to be Netflix and Amazon,â• she said, â??where we watch every single bit of content.â•

(Source: broadcastingandcable.com)

Category

1. distribution
2. television

Date Created
June 28, 2017
Author
hollywoodglee