Film Forever

INSIGHT REPORT

A Field In England

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

The following is the report on the day-and-date release of *A Field In England*. It uses a wide range of data to measure performance on all platforms, and tries to address the key questions about the significance of the release.

A Field In England was released on 5 July 2013 on cinema screens, DVD, VOD and free terrestrial broadcast on Film4.

The BFI Distribution Fund supported the release of the project with £56,701, which contributed to a P&A spend of £112,000. The total production budget was £316,879.

This report uses a number of measures to assess the success of the release:

- Box office reports (daily for opening weekend, weekly thereafter)
- Opening weekend exit polls from FirstMovies International for Picturehouse (cinema)
- DVD/Blu-Ray sales (Opening weekend)
- Television ratings
- Online monitoring (Brilliant Noise for Picturehouse Cinemas)

The conclusions are based on an objective view of the data, interviews both before and after the film's release, and on experience of the UK distribution and exhibition market.

The report evaluates the performance of an individual film but it also tries to explain the context of the release and to suggest lessons for other films trying similar strategies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- *A Field In England* is an experimental, genre-busting film set in the English Civil War and directed by Ben Wheatley (*Down Terrace, Kill List, Sightseers*).
- The film's budget was £316,879, with a £112,000 P&A spend supported by £56,701 from the BFI. It was fully financed by Film4.
- The release plan was enthusiastically supported by Channel 4, Film4, Picturehouse Cinemas, the film-makers and cast.
- The film opened on July 5 on 17 cinema screens, on DVD and Blu-Ray, on VOD, and on free-to-air television through Film4.
- On the opening weekend, the film took £21,399 in theatrical revenues from 17 venues.
- 77% of the cinema audience said they knew it was available free on television.
- The film averaged 367,000 viewers during the Film4 free screening, representing a 3.13% share of the television audience – up 8% for that slot in the schedule in terms of audiences and 13% on share.
- The total television reach of the film was 918,000 viewers, or 1.8% of the population.
- Combined HMV and Amazon DVD and Blu-Ray sales on Friday and Saturday reached 1,462 with Blu-Ray outselling DVD.
- 29% of the theatrical audience, according to the cinema exit poll, rated it 'excellent' and 41% 'very good' giving a 'highly favourable' score of 70%.
- The primary audience was ABC1 18–25-years-old, and frequent cinemagoers in the 25-35+ bracket, who might have already been aware of Wheatley's work.
- The marketing plan was to build interest across all platforms – Channel 4, Film4, Film4OD, Picturehouse Cinemas, the related websites and social media channels and through VOD channels.
- Wheatley and the whole cast supported the release plan and mobilised their active social media fan base.
- Among the marketing innovations was an in-depth masterclass website, which attracted a large, engaged audience.
- An innovative risk-sharing deal was agreed with theatrical and other platforms to ensure that there was no unfair burden on any one area of exploitation.
- Interviews with executives suggested the film would not have bettered its performance through a conventional release.
- The release was an object lesson in team working across platforms.

SECTION ONE: OVERVIEW

A Field In England is the fourth feature from director Ben Wheatley, who has established a reputation as a bold and innovative director and built a strong fan base through his films, *Down Terrace*, *Kill List* and *Sightseers*.

A Field In England is a genre-defying psychedelic take on the English Civil War, written by Amy Jump, produced by Andy Starke and Claire Jones for Rook Films, and financed through Film4.0.

The cast includes Julian Barratt (*The Mighty Boosh*, *Nathan Barley*), Michael Smiley (*Spaced*, *Kill List*), Reece Shearsmith (*The League of Gentlemen*), Richard Glover (*Sightseers*) and Peter Ferdinando (*Tony: London Serial Killer*).

Film4 has been a major supporter of Wheatley, and had been developing ideas with him when he proposed a low-budget film that neatly fitted Film4's innovative Film4.0 model. Film 4.0 was created to find new ways of connecting talent and ideas to audiences.

Picturehouse also made a vital contribution to the ideas and execution of the project, both as exhibitor (Picturehouse Cinemas) and distributor (Picturehouse Entertainment).

The enthusiasm of the director and producers Claire Jones and Andy Starke and the low budget of £316,879 reduced the financial risk and created room for freedom and invention. The unique combination of committed supporters, multimedia skills and clear strategic thinking was critical to the success of the project.

It is crucial to understand that the release model for this project was not an afterthought but an integral part of the development.

All of the contributing parties were convinced that such an unconventional and daring film had little chance of fulfilling its potential under traditional release models but could (and deserved to) find an enthusiastic audience with a fresh approach to releasing.

1.1 Release strategy

The simultaneous multimedia release looked promising, given the strong, even cult following of an unconventional film-maker. The target audience for the film was also expected to be open to the new release pattern and to the online and social media-dominated marketing campaign.

The distributors identified the primary audience as ABC1 18–25-years-old, and the release also targeted frequent cinemagoers (attending more than once a month) in the 25-35+ bracket, who might have already been aware of Wheatley's work. The audience was expected to skew towards men.

There was an expectation that the target audience would have seen, or at least known about Wheatley's earlier films; and that they were likely to have seen work aimed at the same demographic group, including *Shaun Of The Dead*, *Attack The Block* and *Four Lions*.

The active involvement and support of an established theatre group, Picturehouse Cinemas removed, to an extent, one of the key obstacles to any day-and-date strategy in the form of a cinema boycott.

In fact, the stakeholders in *A Field In England* were convinced that any boycott would have had a minimal effect because such an unconventional film was likely to have been released on a fraction of the number of prints that were finally distributed. The day-and-date strategy then may have actually increased the theatrical reach.

SECTION TWO: PLANNING AND EXECUTION

The film opened on July 5 on 17 screens, on DVD and Blu-Ray, on VOD and on free-to-air television through Film4, beginning a multiplatform release schedule.

5 July 2013
Cinemas
VOD (iTunes etc.)
Free TV (transmission C4)
DVD/Blu-Ray

The release of *A Field In England* managed to mobilise a coalition of parties willing to put tremendous energy behind a clear strategy.

Anna Higgs, Commissioning Executive at Film4.0 was an energetic champion of a simultaneous cross-media release from the early stages of development, and she was backed by the Film4 production team. And crucially, she was supported to the full by the film-makers and producers.

The release strategy for *A Field In England* had the significant advantage of a film-maker with a strong and active fanbase (12,000 Twitter followers), and who himself had a keen interest in new forms of communication and distribution.

The support of Film4 was a major factor, not just in terms of reach, but because it has that rare strength in UK film in a recognisable brand associated with quality innovation. Channel 4 offered another important means of marketing to a large audience.

The other key party was Picturehouse, both as exhibitor and distributor. It helped devise, refine and execute the strategy and it shared the risk with Film4 on all aspects of the release (see page 9 for more).

Another major advantage provided by Picturehouse was the local loyalty towards its cinemas around the UK.

The aim of all parties was to build a single momentum around the film in all its forms that would make its opening weekend a real event.

That sense of event encompassed all media, avoiding the impression that it was simply a theatrical project with some cross-media extensions.

Nonetheless, making a plan work with such broad ambitions, and with as many moving parts, was highly challenging and the end results (see section three) were a considerable achievement.

2.1 Channel 4, Film4 and Film4.0

The strategy identified the main platforms for the release as: free TV, DVD, Transactional VOD (TVOD) and cinemas.

Channel 4 was involved directly, or indirectly, in all areas of exploitation except theatrical. As well as television, Channel 4 has its own DVD label (4DVD), which also distributes to transactional VOD (TVOD) platforms such as iTunes.

The channel was enthusiastic about the approach, not least because of the previous track record of Wheatley. The flagship film channel, Film4 Channel was equally keen on the idea. The idea of compressing the windows was seen by both sides as a good way of enhancing the value of their respective platforms.

In addition, both Film4 Channel and Film4.0 felt the approach was a neat fit with their brand positioning – exciting, innovative, and centred on empowering the audience.

Importantly, the marketing department of the Channel 4 group also bought into the idea, improving profile and reach in the market place and able to tap into the Channel's 23 million people that in one way or another visit the Channel.

There was, however, one potential obstacle because Channel 4 needed to operate within the guidelines set out by Ofcom regarding rules about cross-promoting content.

After discussions, the film was able to comply with regulations because it was fully funded and owned by Channel 4, and the Film4 Channel's promotional trailers pushed viewers towards their own television screening as well as other platforms. Without those factors, promotion on the channel for the film might have had to been promoted through paid advertising, which would clearly alter the financing model.

Premium pricing for iTunes was not possible as there was not an exclusive VOD window. The release was simultaneous with the DVD making this impossible under iTunes policy.

2.3 Theatrical release

The theatrical partner for *A Field In England*, Picturehouse Cinemas, has been much more open to new release patterns than most of the exhibition industry and has its own distribution arm, Picturehouse Entertainment. The company also had existing relationships with Channel 4 and Film4 (4DVD are Picturehouse's DVD distributor and Film4 have worked with Picturehouse before as a distributor).

The filmmakers also had pre-existing strong relationships with key Picturehouses' executives.

Even given those advantages, a day-and-date release inevitably creates tensions. In the traditional release, the potential for ancillary platforms can be fairly accurately predicted from theatrical performance. Without box office figures, forecasting becomes much more difficult.

For the theatrical business with its high investment in marketing and prints (P&A), there was an obvious fear of taking too much of the burden of risk, exacerbated by the fear of 'cannibalisation' of audiences when running alongside free TV. (*A Field In England* was a valuable test of how far such widespread concerns are founded in reality).

The strategy to deal with the concerns over 'split rights' was based on creating a 'one pot' derail, where everyone shared the risks and the rewards across all of the exploitation areas. The approach was valuable in encouraging all parties to throw their energy into all aspects of the release.

The willingness of all parties to share ideas, expertise and risks is crucial to understanding the success of the project.

2.7 Marketing

The marketing plan was to build interest across all platforms – Channel 4, Film4, Film4OD, Picturehouse Cinemas, the related websites and social media channels and through VOD channels.

The heavy promotion of the film's innovative release ensured that the film would not only be reviewed as a major release by the key national newspapers but would find its way on to the news pages. The story of the release was also taken up strongly by broadcasters (see Results).

A simultaneous multimedia release of a film by one of the UK's most promising up-and-coming directors inevitably raised questions about its quality and there is still something of a stigma around new release patterns, going back to the straight-to-video/DVD jibe.

The distributors decided to take the issue head on, ensuring that the all-platform release was marketed as a virtue, entirely in tune with a high-quality unconventional film.

It was an attacking, not a defensive strategy with each media playing an active role in both supporting the film and the overall distribution strategy.

Wheatley was a significant part to the marketing plan, beyond his established name. His active use of Twitter, including retweeting audience reviews and comments, contributed much to the final results. He also took part in special Q&A screenings, which sold out participating cinemas.

One of the most interesting aspects of the marketing of the project was an engaging website, commissioned by Film4.0, in collaboration with Wheatley and Rook Films.

The site included a filmmaking masterclass with the director, in-depth interviews and downloadable and shareable free content (See Results).

SECTION THREE: RESULTS

The results for the opening weekend were promising with no obvious signs of fragmentation of the audience to the detriment of any platform. In fact, the results for theatrical, television, DVD and VOD were all close to, or above expectations.

The weekend of the release was not particularly helpful to the film with high temperatures and considerable attention on the tennis at Wimbledon, where Andy Murray was preparing to become the first British men's singles champion in 77 years. A semi-final win on the Friday was followed by a much-hyped final on the Sunday.

The audience profile was very close to the original predictions, pointing to the success of carefully targeted campaign.

The cinema exit polls showed an average age of 35, skewing strongly male (62% to 38%), below the average age of all cinema going.

The exit polls showed that 34% had seen Wheatley's previous hit *Sightseers* and 22% had seen *Kill List*.

3.1 Performance on all media

THEATRICAL

The opening weekend picked up 2,213 admissions with a screen average of £1,259 from 17 sites, finishing at number 20 in the UK chart. That was ahead of expectations despite the hot weather.

Additional special screenings on the opening Friday generated £10,783 from 14 screens. The Q&A screenings at Curzon Soho and ICA on the Sunday following the simultaneous screening were still close to sell-outs.

TELEVISION

Channel 4 research found the film averaged 367,000 viewers during its free television screening, representing a 3.13% share of the television audience – up 8% for that slot in the schedule in terms of audiences and 13% on share. The reach of the film was 918,000 viewers, or 1.8% of the population, based on audiences seeing at least three consecutive minutes of the film, with the peak viewing time between 22.50 and 22.54.

MEDIA	TOTAL opening week	Total as of 12 October 2013	BENCHMARK/FORECAST
Box office (Fri-Sat) Wk1	2,213 admissions Fri-Sat week 1	n/a	
Total box office revenues	£21,399 (17 sites)	£51,409	Forecast: £25,000 - £35,000
Film4 screening	367,000 viewers	n/a	Forecast: 250-300,000 346,000 (slot average)
DVD/Blu-Ray (Fri/Sat/Sun/Mon)	2,154 sales	7,577 sales 5,525 DVD – 2,052 Blu-ray	Total Lifetime forecast: 15,000 full price 20,000 reduced price
Special screenings with Q&A (Fri)	£770 screen avg per show*		
VOD (Rental)		Film4OD 714, iTunes 3,133 Virgin Media 1,746	Forecast 2,000
VOD (EST)		iTunes 680	Forecast: 1,000

(*Screen average is a misleading measure in this instance, given the innovative release, which included a number of split shows.)

It is worth noting that DVD releases are generally on a Monday while film releases are on a Friday. For that reason, despite availability, many bricks-and-mortar stores did not, for logistical reasons, carry any stocks until the Monday.

The figures include recorded viewing on a video recording device (PVR), such as Sky+, as well as those who watched at the scheduled time.

Scheduled viewing was actually down 9% on the slot average but the 3% increase in PVR viewing made up the difference. The reason for that pattern is not clear, although it is fair to conclude that a combination of a young audience and hot weather would have been a key contributory factor, with many potential viewers spending the evening out and catching up later.

The audience for the film was made up of more male, ABC1 and over-55 viewers than is usual for the slot. That fact may be significant, given that it contrasts with the younger audience at the cinema. Given that the over-55s are among the key demographics for cinema, one might speculate that they might have been potential theatrical customers, but the available data does not offer a clear picture.

The screening pulled in the biggest audience for a Ben Wheatley film screening on Film4, up 6% on the first screening of his second feature, *Kill List* in 2011. Again, there is a question mark over the relatively small increase on the *Kill Lis*t premiere, given that Wheatley was not as well established at the time and the theatrical box office was higher (£267K). The 2011 film was, however, exceptionally well reviewed and was more obviously appealing to fans of the horror genre. The performance of such a defiantly unconventional film in an established mainstream television slot deserves recognition.

DVD

Combined HMV and Amazon DVD and Blu-Ray sales on Friday, Saturday and Sunday reached 1,462 with Blu-Ray outselling DVD. The sales may have been adversely affected by a warm weekend, which meant that DVD sales for all films were down more than 30%. On the other hand, it is hard to find an easy comparison for the DVD figures, given that it was released on a Friday, rather than a Monday, and was part of such an unconventional release.

Forecasts always included a large degree of speculation given the nature of the strategy. 4DVD suggested that, over the lifetime of the DVD, it might accrue 15,000 full-price sales and 20,000 at reduced price. This report looks at all revenues up to October 12, by which time sales had reached 7,172.

4DVD suggested that the overall lifetime figure might be achieved but probably with a greater share of reduced price sales to full price.

One interesting aspect of the opening was that Blu-Ray sales initially outsold DVD. An optimistic interpretation might consider the word of mouth about the quality of the cinematography might have supported the higher definition format. As expected, however, DVD sales eventually dominated because supermarkets did not make the shelf space available for Blu-ray.

VOD

The film was the most watched on Film4OD on all three days of the opening weekend and represented 30% of the 4OD weekend sales. There was also a boost for Wheatley's back catalogue with *Sightseers* rentals re-entering the top-10 bestsellers.

The VOD rental figures were well ahead of the 2,000 forecast, with 3,133 on iTunes, 1,746 on Virgin Media, and 714 on Film4OD. Download-to-own figures on iTunes were 680, which was below the predicted 1,000.

In assessing VOD performance against targets, it must be remembered that the release was in uncharted territory, and forecasting was always going to be highly speculative.

The release did not include subscription VOD (SVOD) services, such as Netflix and LoveFilm and some pay-per-view services, notably Sky Box Office.

3.2 Awareness

Online campaign

The online campaign was carefully targeted at a clear core audience and was rewarded with impressive results.

Even among the cinema audience, the biggest single factor in driving awareness was the online campaign (45%), though there was a clear age factor in its effectiveness. 54% of under-35s said online advertising and social media was its primary source of awareness, compared with 35% in the older age range.

That difference is worth noting for the different elements of the online campaign. The online campaign, for example, was the most important awareness rating medium for 53% of the under-35s but only 35% of the over 35s.

Nonetheless, the film successfully mobilised the online campaign, effectively pooling the reach and range of the stakeholder companies to create a buzz, which was amplified by social media conversation. Alongside influencers from news channels (see below), the film and its release pattern were a big source of discussion online among influential voices, including heavy social media influencers in film.

One particular success story was an online digital masterclass, which gave visitors insights into the making of the film and featured Wheatley and the main talent. By the middle of October, it had attracted 80,000 page views and 54,000 visits with an impressive 34% following links to screenings or purchasing options. Encouragingly, there was a high level of engagement from visitors to the masterclass:

- 15,000 of the visitors generated 23,000 video views
- There were 100,000 embeds of video content in third-party sites
- 48% of Masterclass users clicked on at least four sections.

Print and television

The film received the kind of profile on reviews pages that might be expected of a much bigger budget production (see below for reactions). There was also considerable attention given to the release strategy by news organisations and broadcasters.

A big part of the success in awareness raising for this film was its ability to move beyond the culture and entertainment slots of influential online, television, radio and newspaper services and on to the news pages.

The release strategy captured the imagination of a number of news channels, supported by the PR campaign for the film.

In the week leading up to the release, there were items on the film and its release on BBC programmes, including leading items on BBC News online and Radio 4 news, and Radio 4's *Loose Ends*, *Front Row* and the *Film Programme*.

3.3 Critical reaction

The critical reaction was very strong, and it was given heavyweight attention for such a low budget film. Rotten Tomatoes, a website which aggregates reviews, suggested that leading critics had given it a rating of 88%.

The favourable review from the influential Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian set the tone, saying: 'What a unique film-maker Wheatley is becoming. From the realms of contemporary social realism, crime, comedy and fear, he has moved on to lo-fi period drama, but cleverly alighted on the one period that suits his stripped-down visuals and subversive instincts perfectly.'

Even some of the negative reviews recognised it as a bold idea with flaws, rather than a weak film.

Nigel Andrews in The Financial Times cut to the chase in his review: 'Its unprecedented multiple opening in Britain – simultaneously in theatres and on DVD, video-on-demand, Blu-Ray and (tonight) TV channel Film4 – suggests the film's creators think either 'Here is a commercial turkey, let's take the money and run' or 'Here is a new epoch of cinema. Everyone gather round.' I'll go with the second.'

3.4 Audience reaction

The audience reaction was favourable. According to the cinema exit poll, 29% of the theatrical audience rated it 'excellent' and 41% 'very good', giving a 'highly favourable' score of 70%, around 10% above the UK norm.

A much greater proportion of the audience (36%) said the film exceeded their expectations than said it was not as good as expected (11%).

The number of 'definite' recommendations was a little below the UK norm (46% against 50%) but, when probable recommendations were included, 80% of responses were favourable.

The explanation for the relatively lower recommendation levels may come in the main criticism that the film was 'confusing', which was cited by 36% of the audience.

There was also a male-female divide in reactions, with 53% of men saying they would 'definitely' recommend the film against 35% of women, although the response was similar in terms of overall positive recommendation (definite and probable), with 81% from men and 78% from women.

54% of the audience went in with 'quite high' expectations and 78% found those expectations met (42%) or bettered (36%).

The Online Conversation monitoring suggested that 10% of the online discussion, overwhelmingly on Twitter, was positive, while just 3% was negative. Those figures demonstrably underrepresent the positive, given that each mention of a screening on different platforms is an active piece of word-of-mouth promotion.

3.5 Social media

Twitter accounted for the vast majority of mentions on social media sites with 94% of total traffic, according to the Online Conversation monitoring by Brilliant Noise.

There was a very strong push on the Friday of the release, which represented the vast majority of the 12,000 mentions on social media sites. The tweets included support from key influencers, including Film4 and Virgin, who were showing the film, and critics, including the BBC and Observer's Mark Kermode. The film trended number one on Twitter on the Friday of the release.

The conversation continued at a lower but still significant level over the weekend, helping generate word of mouth sales.

There was a gradual build up in the social media mentions in the lead up to the launch with increase in activity around trailer launches and festival appearances, notably Karlovy Vary on July 4. The evidence of the cinema exit polls suggests that online activity was an essential part of the marketing, particularly among the under-35s, where it was the main influencer for attending a screening.

3.6 Repeat viewing

The reaction from the cinema exit polling suggested that the simultaneous release would not damage repeat viewing potential (a major criticism of opponents of day-and-date releases).

68% of cinema audiences said they would be interested in a second viewing (five per cent above the pollsters UK norm) 27% considering buying or renting on DVD/Blu-Ray, 14% on television and 10% at the cinema.

The potential on-demand audience remains fairly low with 10% potentially interested in downloading the film and 6% on VOD.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

The results for *A Field In England* include some unequivocal positives.

As discussed below, there is an argument that the publicity surrounding the innovative release played a very big role in generating sales, which would not be replicated by future films adopting the model. That, however, does not undermine the fact that the film reached or outperformed expectations on *all* platforms on its opening weekend.

The big argument against day-and-date releasing is that it will take audiences away from traditional platforms, particularly cinema, and fragment demand (and hence revenues).

One clear factor, replicated in other day-and-date releases but often lost in the debate about windows, is that there is a significant proportion of the theatrical audience for independent film, which simply loves the cinema and will always go.

The exit polls showed 70% were 'frequent cinemagoers', visiting the cinema at least once a month and 64% suggested that they had chosen to see the film at the cinema because they preferred the 'cinema experience'. And 73% said they would recommend the film to friends to be seen at the cinema, compared with just 6% on DVD or Blu-Ray.

The Q&A was a major draw for this film, which may have exaggerated the cinema interest – 51% of the Friday night audience said the Q&A was a reason to prefer seeing the film on the big screen.

The real significance of those results, however, are that the cinema audience was fully aware of the alternatives – 77% of the cinema audience knew it was available for *free* on the Film4 channel.

The conclusion seems to be that frequent cinemagoers will not be swayed by alternative options and that others may be convinced to go to theatres if there is a compelling experience on offer.

4.1 Success Factors

The film's strategy offered a number of important lessons for future releases:

1. The value of cooperation

The unique aspect of this release, in relation to most other day-and-date experiments, is the enthusiasm and commitment of all the partners – film-maker, television, online and theatrical. The pooling and coordination of the marketing on all platforms increased the reach of the film and allowed a dynamic means of reaching different audiences on the media of their choice.

The active involvement of an exhibitor may have been particularly significant, not only in promoting the film, but in closing off some of the negative media messages about boycotts and opposition that have tended to become the main story in previous simultaneous releases.

2. The power of social media

Social media was the primary source of awareness among the target under-35s audience (53%). While there was a minority of negative reactions to the film, the immediate availability across a range of media was generally seen as a plus. In fact, the sentiment of the tweets suggests that the ability to watch on a range of media generated excitement all of its own.

In fact, analysing the social media conversation, there are reasons to believe that day-and-date has the potential to increase and accelerate word of mouth reaction. One promising by-product of simultaneous releasing is that cinema, television and on-demand audiences can all join the online conversation at the same time.

Obviously, negative word of mouth can spread as quickly as positive, but if the film is strong enough and creates enough talking points, the added buzz may become very significant.

3. The importance of events and consumer 'experiences'

A Field In England succeeded in its aim of becoming an 'event.' What's more that sense of an event does not appear to have been diluted by the multiplatform release – indeed the different media releases were able to create a set of individual 'experiences' which were optimised for their audiences and yet clearly part of the same overarching event.

While these terms are often lazily applied, this release genuinely tested the ideas that different platforms 'engage' audiences in different ways. The cinema release included a number of special screenings linked by satellite that were able to attract sell-out audiences in some venues.

On a smaller scale, some cinemas built in added-value extras, such as Sealed Knot drummers, badges and real ale (supported by sponsors). The free Film4 television screening was given the appropriate build-up with entertaining trailers, an interview with Wheatley, and screenings of *Down Terrace* and *Kill List* on the days before the launch. The Digital Masterclass online was a particularly strong use of new media.

4. The art of momentum building

A sense of anticipation and expectation is essential to any event, and *A Field In England* succeeded according to all the measurable data. The cinema exit poll suggested that just 8% of the audience came in with no expectations, and 1% with 'quite low' expectations. More than half (54%) went to a screening with 'quite high' expectations.

A large majority of the cinema audience (73%) made an 'active decision' to see the film with 57% pre-planning to see the film a week before the film came out, and a further 18% in the week before opening.

5. Engaging and informing

The key participants each ensured that their audiences were kept informed of developments throughout the distribution period. The use of social media was often exemplary, ensuring a high degree of interaction. This willingness to explain and discuss issues probably contributed strongly to the consumer's perception of the release strategy.

6. A committed team

Executing the strategy was complex. The team was made up of departments and people who do not usually work together so closely, and seldom have such a common goal. This can cause stress and conflict in such a deadline-driven project. A whole new process and way of working needed to be constructed quickly and effectively with all members of the team.

There was a palpable sense of excitement among all of the people working on the project. Everyone described it as a positive experience. Having a common goal helped, but equally important was the working across silos and boundaries, and learning from each others knowledge

4.2 Key questions

Does *A Field In England* represent a replicable model for independent film?

The release of *A Field In England* worked on its own terms but it cannot be said to have definitively proven the case for all independent films released day-and-date.

Given the age of the core arthouse audience, there are questions about the effectiveness of some of the factors that drove success in this case, such as the social media campaign, among older audiences. (See p.16)

This was a film that brought together enthusiastic and experienced businesses with first-class access to the market and proven brand recognition. Of the key partners, Film4 and Channel 4 have over the years built up a degree of brand loyalty and an expectation that they will provide quality and innovation. The individual cinemas in the Picturehouse chain often have strong local loyalties.

The director has established a following and has embraced the potential of social media to keep that fanbase interested. And the demographic for the film was very promising, more tuned into social media and more open, even expectant, of multimedia access to content.

And there was that crucial factor of considerable media interest in a new releasing model.

Would the same approach work for a lesser-known filmmaker, an older demographic or less hype? Ben Wheatley, after all, built his reputation on the old release pattern, even if he had used new means to engage his audiences.

Significantly, it was the appeal of Wheatley that was the biggest single factor in attracting audiences to theatres, according to the cinema exit poll (52% of audiences). That appeal also gives a clue that the audience was dominated by cinephiles and enthusiasts: 34% of the audience had seen *Sightseers* and 22% *Kill List*, and many more would have been aware of his films. Those are impressive figures for an independent UK director, if not quite yet on the level of a Shane Meadows.

Some of the cast have themselves established a following, supported by social media: Shearsmith (20%), Barrat and Smiley (14-17%) were all cited in the cinema exit poll as a primary reason to attend a theatrical screening.

Did the attention on the innovative release skew the results?

Evidence that the release model for *A Field In England* would be applicable to any similar film is arguably skewed by the publicity surrounding it.

While the film unquestionably created the kind of buzz associated with a bigger-budget release, much of the publicity was about the 'early adopter' model and that will not be afforded to others following the same path.

As previous day-and-date releases, such as Revolver's 2008 release of *Mum & Dad*, have demonstrated, the opposition to windows among many exhibitors is intense and films breaking windows become *cause celebres*.

The involvement of an exhibitor in the innovative distribution strategy helped shaped some of the more positive narrative around this release and the evidence from all platforms suggests a positive consumer reaction to the experiment.

The key stakeholders logically and effectively tied the all-platforms availability into the overall marketing campaign, and the message came across strongly that here was a bold and innovative film-maker reaching the public with a bold and innovative film.

There are fair questions about what would have happens to day-and-date releases when such patterns become mainstream, or at least are no longer a story that interests the media (and of course when they are not supported by the BFI). But such questions will only be answered over time.

It is also important to recognise that the support from Picturehouse does not represent a trend among exhibitors more generally. Resistance to closing release windows is still very strong among many exhibitors, reaffirmed by strong statements at Cannes from cinema bodies, such as Europa Cinemas. There is a question to be answered about how many cinemas might have taken the film if it had been released more conventionally. (See below).

While these are all salient arguments, the point of this release, however, is that it showed that an adventurous UK arthouse film can be released without apparent damage to the theatrical platform.

A Field In England is exactly the kind of film that those who advocate a firm stand against changes to windows suggest would be damaged. At the very least, there is now a new and powerful additional dimension to that debate, putting a practical case study into an argument dominated by rhetoric and assumption.

One might even make a case that the publicity around the release strategy actually strengthens the case in favour of similar models. This release went out of its way to publicise the availability on multiple platforms; the evidence from the opinion polls is that a large majority of the cinema audience (77%) was fully aware of the availability on free television and still went to see it on a big screen.

The online conversation offered an important perspective that should not be lost. The industry debate about the effects of day-and-date releasing, and what it might say about the quality of a film, is not reflected in the Twitter conversation.

The availability of a film on a range of platforms seems to have been taken as a positive move to match customer expectation, rather than any fear that it would not succeed in the old theatrically-led model.

The stigma that came with ‘straight to video’ does not seem to be carrying over to day-and-date release. To be fair, that conversation was heavily seeded by Film4 and Picturehouse, helping generate a positive spin, but they were competing with years of negativity about new release patterns.

There is always a strong element of speculation when judging the success of this kind of release: would it have worked as well, or even better through a more conventional release?

Is simultaneous multimedia releasing an efficient use of limited resources?

There is another essential question that must be asked about multimedia releasing, and cross-media projects more generally – and that is about the ratio of effort to returns.

There is an inherent degree of wastage in multimedia marketing. Campaigns now reach across a wide variety of media but the audience will generally only come into contact with a relatively small number of those messages.

That may simply be a fact of life in a multimedia age. Audience demand has fragmented and there is no single and simple means of attracting customers.

The campaign for *A Field In England* offered an object lesson in prioritising media spend and focusing on a clear target audience. Efficient targeting and personalisation may now be the key tools.

There is a case to be made that day-and-date releases of this kind are efficient in that they create a unified marketing push, which maximises pre-awareness, in turn supporting the film in all its forms. Having no window at all, in that case, makes more sense than simply reducing the existing theatrical window by a few weeks.

Nonetheless, this release, supported by the BFI, spent a great deal of energy in generating interest in a way that might not be realistic for many independent producers. The counter-argument is that theatrical success remains an efficient way of generating word of mouth that will knock on to other media, at least in terms of workload.

The counter-argument is that the new release models can increase reach to the large numbers who, out of inclination or lack of access, will not or cannot attend a cinema screening.
This particular release does not truly answer that question, given its relatively limited release in the UK as a whole and the concentration on theatrical and a television service, whose chief constituency is cinemagoers.

Does the young, male bias in this release represent a bigger issue?

There are legitimate questions that have been raised in other creative industries where technology and online media are playing a transformative role, about a bias towards young male audiences.

In terms of age, some of the more creative aspects of the campaign, revealed big divides based on age.

The online campaign was a much greater source of awareness among under-35s (54%) than over-35s (35%) and, although it was not specifically measured, it is logical to assume that the divide is much greater between under-25s and over-45s.

The cinema exit poll showed that 68% of the audience felt that the key appeal of the film was to 25-34-year-olds.

Perhaps significantly, the free-to-air television audience was older than the average for the slot. 42% of the audience for the Friday Film4 screening was over-55, which is a critical demographic for most arthouse and specialised films.

Although there is no evidence either way, it is fair to ask if that audience have been more likely to attend a cinema screening with a wider release in the traditional model. Certainly, it raises questions for films that are specifically aimed at an older audience.

The Film4 audience was also heavily male-dominated – even more so than the cinema audience, at 74%, although it also skewed older than the norm for its slot.

The marked male-female divide in the results for *A Field In England* are worth noting and may have broader significance.

The make-up of the audience and the reaction to the film were not surprising given that under-35 males were specifically identified as a core market. The fact that a smartly focused campaign succeeded in attracting that audience is simply a credit to the marketing.

Yet despite the disparity in the male-female split among the cinema audience (62% to 38%), the cinema exit polls suggested that a large majority of the audience (71%) did not see any difference in the appeal of the film to men and women (though only 1% suggested any greater appeal to women, against 24% to men.)

The cinema exit polling suggests that the male bias to the appeal of the film was not recognised by the audience (though that audience was itself male dominated).

Some factors seem, however, to suggest an underlying divide, particularly in terms of the impact of marketing.

The average number of sources seen by male audiences, according to the cinema exit poll, was 1.7, compared to 1.5 for females. The promotion around DVD, television and VOD had much more effect on the decision to go to the cinema among men (27%) than women (14%).

These factors may be specific to this film. The multimedia marketing was aimed to hit young male audiences and a female-oriented film would have found different ways to create awareness.

It is also possible to surmise that many of the women who were polled at cinemas may not have chosen to see the film themselves but were accompanying a male partner, who had made the active choice. The opposite findings may arise in a film predominantly aimed at a female audience.

Nonetheless, there are questions remaining about the impact of social media on film choices, and even of the potential of multimedia releasing, among women. This project was not specifically set up to investigate that possibility and so it remains an open discussion.

Can simultaneous releasing increase and widen the specialised film audience?

There are questions that the scale of this experiment could only partially resolve. The day-and-date release was limited to a relatively small number of established cinemas, and there is plenty of evidence from the polls that they were representative of a loyal arthouse and specialised film audience (more than 70% of the audience questioned in the exit polls went to the cinema more than once a month).

It is not clear what a wider release on the traditional model would have achieved with the same energy, though it is fair to make some assumptions. (See p.19).

Given that some of the cinemas showing the film, supported by a Q&A, actually sold out, or nearly sold out, it is clear that the old model would have struggled to better the model in the cinemas that actually showed the film.

The above average television performance of *A Field In England* in a slot normally occupied by much more mainstream film (See Page 10) is also a promising indicator of potential demand.

The power of the social media conversation around the film, which included audiences on all platforms, should not be underestimated and would have contributed to the staying power of the film over the following days and weeks.

Nonetheless, there are questions to answer about the potential of these kind of releases to create buzz and reach beyond a pre-existing demand centred on London.

The revenues from the film were heavily influenced by the performance of major arthouse venues in the Capital, with the takings at the Ritzy and Curzon Soho well above the average.

There may have been a hint of dissent from the consensus of opinion in exit polling in Liverpool, where 20% of the audience found the film 'disappointing' compared with 3-5% elsewhere. This may be a more important issue worth more consideration. Many of the cinemas outside London may be more inclined to boycott day-and-date films, given the smaller potential audience, often weaker profit margins and less of a tie to the cultural zeitgeist.

One factor that this release has not really tested is price. The free-to-air simultaneous screening was interesting, showing that the cinema experience can still be compelling even when up against a free alternative.

Nonetheless, most windows-busting releases will come with some form of payment attached, perhaps including a Premium VOD higher price for simultaneous access. Price sensitivity is likely to become a major issue that will severely test the appetite among uncommitted cinephiles to multi-platform choices.

Did the strategy succeed?

The key question, of course, is whether this release resulted in more people buying and/or watching the film. This is notoriously hard to quantify, but despite that some reasonable assumptions need to be made.

A reasonable comparison might be Miranda July's *The Future*, in that it was a challenging low-budget Film4-backed film with a strong creative vision. *The Future* was also released by Picturehouse, on November 4, 2011 on 16 screens. It premiered in the Film4 channel on the June 24, 2012.

Despite taking more money at the box office, the DVD and especially the number of viewers were well down on the comparable figures for *A Field In England*. (See below).

Such comparisons are not conclusive but in a discussion for this report with three relevant executives (off the record), all said that *A Field In England* would have been a severe challenge for conventional release.

Despite the obvious appeal of Ben Wheatley as the director, the subject matter and the creative vision were not as 'commercial' in a way that for example *Sightseers* or *Kill List* were.

When asked the question directly, no one thought that more people would have bought or seen the film if it had been given a more traditional release.

Title	Budget £	Film4 Investment £	Theatrical £	DVD sales	First TV TX
The Future 90k p&a	1,127,000	250,000	77,211	1,583	106,000 (consolidated)
A Field In England	316,879	316,879	51,409	7,700	367,000

NB *The Future* opened on 15 screens and all performances in the opening week, compared to *A Field In England*'s 17 screens and limited performances.

- Picturehouse executives believed the film more or less reached a box office number that they were forecasting.
- 4DVD said that the film would have 'sunk without a trace' on DVD, four months on from a modest theatrical release.
- Film4 channel estimated that there might have been 200,000 viewers on the first transmission of the film, nine-to-12 months after theatrical release.

The reasons given for this were very clear from all the executives. The marketing and promotional push that the film received from Channel 4 was critical in getting the results that were achieved. The efficiency of one push at the same time plus the large reach that Channel 4 can deliver was key.

4.3 Final conclusions

There is promise, however, for independents in this release. While the director may have a recognisable name, this film was far from a genre film. By far the biggest 'key impression' cited in the cinema exit polls (71%) was that the film was 'different' and 'original'.

This release may help change the tone of that question. The old models were clearly not working for a very large number of independents and *A Field In England* at least offers a demonstration how day-and-date multimedia launches can be made to work.

Given the crowded marketplace, this kind of release may become essential for challenging low-budget film. While a cinema boycott of day-and-date releases may continue, the reality is that the generally tiny theatrical release for this kind of work has never been a great way of connecting with audiences.

What *A Field In England* also shows, however, is that new release models need to be an integral part of the entire strategy for a film, and considered at the earliest stage.

It also demonstrates the commitment required from a dedicated and knowledgeable team to make it work. The advantages offered by working with major players like Channel 4, Film4 and Picturehouse are clear but should not be overstated.

The release was made to work by a small but passionate team determined to make it work.

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