

PRINTS & ADVERTISING FUND

Case study

Catfish

Distributor: Momentum Pictures

Release Date: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010



An unexpected hit at the Sundance Film Festival and one of the most talked about titles at the London Film Festival in November, *Catfish* is very much a film of the moment; a compelling mystery and cautionary tale about the way social media has infiltrated all areas of our lives.

The distributors, Momentum Pictures, picked up the film expecting smart urbanite audiences to be intrigued and stimulated by the premise, which they consider has the potential to become a cultural discussion point.

Rationale for lottery funding

Whilst the film has integral qualities, the rationale for P&A funding lay primarily in supporting Momentum's innovative release strategy and plans for finding an audience for specialised film, in this case specialised by virtue of being a documentary.

Specifically, Momentum planned to shorten the release windows by making the film available on VOD/PPV (Video on Demand/Pay per view) and at the cinemas simultaneously, then releasing the DVD for rental just two weeks afterwards, and for retail two weeks after that. (In the UK, the usual window between theatrical release and DVD release is 16 weeks, with VOD often alongside DVD).

In this instance, P&A funding of £67,000 was awarded, to increase the theatrical footprint by delivering an innovative multi-site and interactive premiere to launch the film, which would then augment the film's profile and efficacy of the rest of the release. Momentum's partner for the premiere was the DVD and online movie rental service, Lovefilm.

Implementing the release strategy

A special preview screening of *Catfish* was held on Tuesday 14th December, three days before the national release date.

The host venue was the Prince Charles Cinema in Leicester Square, but the film was also programmed into 29 other venues nationwide. In order to book those sites, Momentum did screen hires with free ticket giveaways in 12 Cineworld sites and the Prince Charles Cinema, and they played the film as a paid preview in the other 17 venues.

The preview screening began simultaneously in all 29 cinemas, whilst 100 online winners – through a competition organised by Lovefilm - simultaneously enjoyed a private online premiere of the film on their own computer (streamed via the Lovefilm website).

Following this special screening, the lead in the film, Nev Schulman, then took part in a Q&A discussion broadcast by satellite to all the other participating cinemas. The event was moderated by Helen Cowley, edi-

Typical release window



catfish release window



tor at Lovefilm, who took questions not only from the Prince Charles Cinema audience (where the Q&A was hosted), but also from Twitter and from the moderated chatroom of the same 100 online guests who had enjoyed the private online premiere earlier. All participating cinema and online audiences were to be able to see Helen and Nev plus the two interacting feeds all together on the big screen.

Unfortunately a lack of broadband connectivity to the digital projectors meant that the streamed Q&A could only be broadcast in 17 of the 29 cinemas.

However the feedback from those cinemas who screened the whole programme was unanimously positive. Whilst the signal was not always perfect in some venues due to internet bandwidth, Momentum believe that the extra interactivity supplied by the on-screen Twitter and chat-room feeds made up for this and added to the 'event' feel.

## Results

The film grossed £3,919 in ticket sales, and including the attendees in the Prince Charles Cinema and Cineworld, the film screened to just over 1,000 people on the night.

*Catfish* opened on Friday 17th Dec in 15 sites nationwide and grossed £48,469 (£1,870 screen avg) in its opening weekend. The mid-week and the second weekend were affected by the run up to Christmas, but Momentum were still able to add four sites to hit 19 cinemas and by the end of the second week the box office was £89,721.

The numbers were good enough in some sites (particularly Curzon Soho) to hold the film for a number of weeks post initial release, and by this stage, the continued box office takings became particularly notable given the simultaneous VOD and PPV platform availability. In addition, Momentum added follow-on bookings to play over the first six weeks, as a result of the opening success of the film

By the end of the eight-week theatrical run the film had grossed £144,064. This is a solid result for a documentary (placing it 46th in the all-time box office for documentaries) and is the most successful simultaneous multi-platform release in the UK.

## Conclusion

Perfectly suited to the digital themes of the film, this event served as a major publicity driver for the film and broadened its reach into cinemas which may not have otherwise screened it, due to the film's specialised nature.

The mostly positive word of mouth this generated (especially on Twitter) fed helpfully into the cinema release. The film clearly worked more as a buzzy talking point film in cinemas - playing particularly well in Soho, with the actual event creating very good word of mouth publicity for the theatrical release.

Most interestingly, the multi-platform message did not take away from the cinema performance, however the traditional DVD sales did not actually benefit from the very short window.

Momentum felt that this has been a worthwhile exercise, as distributors try to navigate their way through the rapidly changing ways that consumers are choosing to watch film. And thematically, this particular film lent itself well to a trial of shifting windows and testing out new platforms.

It is hoped that these healthy numbers for a relatively niche release will encourage others to continue to experiment with release strategies.



Nev Schulman and Helen Cowley at the Q&A, Prince Charles Cinema, London

## Results

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <u>Theatrical</u><br>(during 8-week run)           | £144K       |
| <u>On Demand</u><br>(from 15/12/2010 - 31/01/11)   |             |
| VOD  | 10,600 buys |
| PPV  | 2,100 buys  |
| EST (electronic sell-through /<br>download to own) | 400 buys    |
| <u>DVD</u>   |             |
| rental   | 5,000 rents |
| retail   | 7,127 sales |