

Film Hub Wales Marketing Strategy Executive Summary

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Jo Comino

Freelance film consultant

Executive Summary

Film Hub Wales Marketing Strategy Brief

- Film Hub Wales (FHW) is one of nine hubs set up nationwide in 2013 by the British Film Institute's Film Audience Network (FAN) to promote British and independent film and to support the exhibition sector through research and development, training and audience development projects
- Through Chapter, its lead organisation, FHW receives funding through the National Lottery to support film exhibition through its partner members across Wales.
- Alongside a rural community exhibition report and a major audience development study, *Understanding our Audiences*, Film Hub Wales has commissioned this scoping study of current marketing methods and frequency of programming cycles among a range of independent cinema exhibitors in Wales.
- The aim is
 - to put in place a marketing strategy for the Hub to maximise the impact of nationwide seasons such as the BFI's second UK-wide 'blockbuster' season, *Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder*,
 - to afford practical advice, resources and information to members as they carry out their regular screening programmes.
- A sample of venues throughout Wales were selected to afford a geographical spread Wales wide that spans metropolitan, urban and rural locations, varying in terms of economic prosperity.
- The sample comprises a variety of types of cinema exhibitors showing specialist film, ranging from community cinemas and film societies to cross-arts venues and film festivals.
- As well as direct consultation with staff from Film Hub Wales and Ffilm Cymru Wales (formerly Film Agency Wales), the report explores marketing advice and resources that Sinemau Cymru, Cinema For All (formerly the British Federation of Film Societies), Moviola, and Flicks in the Sticks have to offer to affiliated organisations.

Cinema Exhibition in Wales

- There is a proliferation of independent and community cinema exhibitors in Wales because of the relatively few areas of high population density in the country.
- Community cinemas, film societies, cross-arts venues and film festivals respond to a need for viewing a range of film titles on the big screen that are not fulfilled by commercial cinemas or multiplexes.

- This study looks at a cross-section of these types of cinema exhibition though the distinctions between them are by no means clear-cut.
- Ffilm Cymru Wales (formerly Film Agency Wales) funds specialist film exhibition at seventeen cross-arts venues – but no film societies or community cinemas¹ though it has developed flexible community provision in places where there is no venue, for example, the 3 year BIG Lottery funded mobile cinema project, Film in Afan² – nationally on a three-year renewal cycle.
- Encouraging smaller film exhibitors to take greater risks in terms of the content they screen is an issue that Ffilm Cymru Wales, working in partnership with Film Hub Wales, seeks to address. The following factors affect marketing practice:
 - Geography – proximity to areas of high population density (metropolitan or urban).
 - Nature of organisation – whether membership schemes (in the case of film societies or clubs) or incentives apply.
 - Festivals – appeal to specialised audiences that are not exclusively local but can also be national or international.
 - Demographic – factors such as age, gender, social grouping, relating to the type of organisation and its location, e.g. whether there is a high proportion of incomers or substantial tourist trade.
 - Welsh language – whether the venue is situated within a predominantly Welsh-speaking area and this is reflected in its print and digital output.
- Face-to-face meetings with representatives from each of the organisations selected were carried out between July and August 2014 and the results analysed, drawing on additional information from *Wales Goes Dark* (BFI Gothic) questionnaires and marketing templates.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

- Marketing is a question of telling stories, whether in words, or through pictures, moving image, sound, design. The recipients of a particular story constitute a potential audience. Narratives can engage, and persuade individuals and groups to take part in what is going on.

¹ Ffilm Cymru Wales allocates a total of £60,000 for festivals and £100,000 for cinema funding so that with the increasing number of Film Societies across Wales, it cannot accommodate further funding for clubs and societies

² <http://www.filminafan.com/>. This is an exemplar case study in the Welsh Government report, recently commissioned by Baroness Andrews <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/publications/culture-and-poverty-kay-andrews-report/?lang=en>

- A highly effective way of marketing is to get other people, whether they are members of the audience or the press, to tell your story for you.
- The personnel of many film exhibition venues, whatever their size, are, to a greater or lesser extent, both money (in terms of lack or paid staff and/or restricted budgets) and time poor.
- The range and quality of film exhibition that venues and organisations deliver is not always visible either on the ground or online.

Recommendation 1

Film Hub Wales can assist in making the work that its Hub members already do visible by showcasing a particular organisation or venue each month on its forthcoming bespoke website and through social media channels. This would encourage members to become more aware about how they present themselves to the outside world and to their audiences.

- There are geographical divides between North and South Wales with the West and Mid-Wales, to some extent, falling between two stools, with some perception that funding and expertise are Cardiff-centric.
- Film Hub Wales has an important role to play in making its member venues aware of opportunities.

Recommendation 2

Film Hub Wales should continue to deliver surgeries for Hub member clusters in different parts of the country as well as site visits to individual venues.

- There appears to be a strong requirement for quality Welsh language cinema and moving image or films which have a local connection.

Recommendation 3

An endorsement of Recommendation 8 in the Rural community film exhibition in Wales report that the profile of Welsh-language films and films filmed in Wales with Welsh talent should be raised by Film Hub Wales, in association with the work done by Ffilm Cymru Wales³. The Film Hub Wales website already has a Made in Wales section⁴. Occasions such as the BAFTA Cymru Awards (26 October 2014) would seem ideal opportunities for promotion of Welsh talent and a springboard for a touring Welsh film package, which would also have the benefit of joined-up marketing.

- Many smaller film exhibitors put considerable work into devising interesting or unusual programmes or seasons. Some of these ideas might benefit from being shared and developed, in some exceptional cases through the BFI's Programme Development Fund.

³ See pp. 57-8.

⁴ <http://www.chapter.org/node/5657>

- Some film exhibitors, particularly film clubs and societies, which generally fix their seasons in early summer, feel that programming for BFI's 'blockbuster' season does not allow for sufficient take-up time.
- To echo the findings of the rural community film exhibition report⁵, a simple pitch to Hub Members about BFI Blockbuster Seasons and other packages is of paramount importance; prior knowledge must not be assumed.

Recommendation 5

All future seasons or packages should be phrased clearly and succinctly, outlining in a few sentences exactly what is on offer, and what the benefits and costs are.

- Keeping up to date with forthcoming film releases at first-hand is extremely important with regard to retaining audiences. Regular viewing makes for informed programming choices.
- Previews mean that films can be sold to audiences in a more direct and effective manner.
- Screening Days are currently perceived to be south-centred.

Recommendation 6

Film Hub Wales, in collaboration with the Independent Cinema Office, should ensure that viewing sessions are held at regular intervals and achieve a reasonable geographical spread, using metropolitan and rural screening facilities. Arrangements should be made with Film Hub SWWM and Film Hub NW so that, for example, venues in North Wales would be encouraged to attend screenings in Manchester. Screeners might also facilitate previewing for those film exhibitors unwilling or unable to travel.

- There are geographical demarcations even within given catchment areas that affect cinema-going habits. Film exhibitors on the whole seem to be very well aware of factors such as demographics, transport and environmental issues, parking and catering amenities that have an impact on local attendances.
- Numerous skills, some of which are not directly film related, such as volunteer management, IT skills, design and desktop publishing, are required in order to run a cinema.
- The importance of data capture cannot be underestimated as a way of understanding audiences. Film societies and community cinema operate on a scale that enables them to keep track of attendees but cross-arts centres have used reward systems and loyalty schemes, the CLIC card at Chapter and discounted tickets at Galeri for advance booking, to incentivise data capture.

⁵ *Rural community film exhibition in Wales*, 4.1, Over-arching principles, Recommendation 1, pp. 42-3

- Attracting young people and even the 30-40 age groups is difficult; the way people consume media is evolving along with new technologies and traditional cinema-going too is gradually changing. It is worth pooling information on what strategies have been used successfully to draw in and retain these younger audiences.
- Print, though costly, is still the most important component of marketing for all but metropolitan venues. The time constraints of putting together a quarterly or seasonal brochure do not make for flexibility in terms of film programming. Release dates are rarely fixed in advance and are subject to last-minute changes by distributors. .
- Flyers to publicise high summer seasons or programme alterations are commonly produced quickly and as cheaply as possible, sometimes in-house. There is scope to improve the quality of these.

Recommendation 7

It would be advantageous for a small pot of funding to be available for cross-arts venues to apply to in order to improve the quality of cinema-specific marketing that cannot be accommodated within seasonal brochures, including flyer design and print.

- Smaller exhibitors such as film clubs and community cinemas expressed dissatisfaction with their existing websites; often whole layers of content were invisible. There is a strong rationale for setting up website workshops or forums.
- Film societies and community cinemas that do not have the benefit of MPD or Deluxe accounts expressed a strong interest in sourcing quads and posters.
- Associations such as Moviola, Flicks in the Sticks and Cinema For All provide advice, support and resources to their members.

Recommendation 8

A section of the new Film Hub Wales website should be devoted to resources, links and information, a one-stop shop for members' marketing needs; this provision is likely to be provided in a Community Area that members will be able to log into.

- Organisations are comfortable within their own tried and tested groups and networks but this can lead to rigid and fixed ways of doing things. There was interest expressed in the activities of neighbouring organisations and opportunities for collaboration.
- Sharing ideas and solutions can be stimulating.

- The BFI FAN structure is based on the concept of networking and is still very much in the process of evolving. It is partly up to the Film Hubs and their members to ensure that the way the system develops should be, as intended, non-hierarchical so that ideas can be shared from the ground level up.
- Some community cinemas and film societies give anecdotal evidence that they already go out into the community or help others to get started with similar ventures. Sharing expertise (as well as equipment and technical know-how) both locally and nationally can be productive.
- Traditional courses can be seen to appeal to the already converted.

Recommendation 9

Sharing, mentoring and/or bespoke training – addressing specific rather than general issues – should be considered over or alongside traditional marketing courses. Taking time out of work to travel to and attend training sessions can be problematic but focused advice or training, with expertise delivered or shared within regional clusters, would prove extremely worthwhile.

- There is a wide disparity among film exhibitors regarding ease with digital marketing. Larger metropolitan, cross-arts venues and festivals have a greater facility with and reach through Twitter and Facebook. To some extent, this is due to demographics; older age groups are more resistant to social media.
- Advocacy – there is a need to convince some smaller film exhibitors that social media will be of benefit, if not now, then in the (short term) future. How can these organisations engage with new technologies? How will it benefit them directly? Can use of social media be incentivised as part of a challenge or project? Cinema For All (BFFS) has an online presentation in PDF form⁶ that answers some of these questions and provides invaluable advice and guidance.
- Young people can be recruited to assist with social media, for example, through setting up partnerships via Creative Skillset's Apprenticeships for Creative and Digital Media⁷. One question to bear in mind when setting up placements is how to build in a lasting legacy to the organisation once the trainee moves on.
- Tone of voice – this is a neglected aspect of marketing that has an enormous impact on how organisations project themselves and what they do. The transcript of a talk⁸ by Robert Mills, a Cardiff-based content developer, available online, gets the salient points across.

⁶http://www.bffs.org.uk/export/sites/bffs_site/pdf/Social_Networking_Presentation.pdf

⁷http://creativeskillset.org/who_we_help/training_educators/provide_apprenticeship/wales/creative_digital_media

⁸<http://www.robertmills.me/revolution-conf-tone-of-voice/>

- Film Hub Wales's Development Officer, Lisa Nesbitt, is taking part in a Creative Digital Marketing Project that addresses some of the items raised above. The first part of the scope relates to digital engagement within the Hub, and covers analysis of online engagement, testing and advocacy.

Recommendation 10

There is a strong case for Film Hub Wales to appoint a small team of digital media experts or practitioners to appraise, advise and advocate on the visibility of member organisations online, covering both websites, e-shots and social media channels. These could take the form of surgeries or workshops.

- Though PR materials and training are useful resources, it is extremely difficult to generate press interest in national stories for cinema.

Recommendation 11

Film Hub Wales should take the lead on developing and co-ordinating national press stories, concentrating on what is distinctive, 'special', about film exhibition in Wales – for example, the partnership between Chapter's Darkened Rooms, FHW and Cadw⁹, – weaving together local events within a national thread. It is well worth investing in a consultant who specialises in film PR to undertake any major campaign; they will simply have the contacts and expertise necessary to achieve a breakthrough.

- FHW is in the best position to make its 13 partners taking part in BFI Sci-Fi Blockbuster from October 2014 through to January 2015 visible. Resources are available, both nationally through the BFI, and regionally to market the season. Resources include posters and other artwork, trailers and Digital media assets as part of a national social media campaign using hash tags #BFISciFi #SciFiWales.
- The second part of Lisa Nesbitt's Creative Digital Marketing Project relates specifically to BFI Sci-Fi and involves the creation of an online network, a social campaign and support with targeted online marketing.

Recommendation 12

As well as being fully informed of details in the national campaign, FHW's Sci-Fi partners should be encouraged to make contact with local interest groups who could be motivated to promote the events through their networks in their own fashion, for example through role-play. Advocates can be resourceful and inventive – in the way that Super fans have, in the past, been targeted and recruited to promote Secret Cinema events.¹⁰ These strategies can be effective on different scales.

⁹ <http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/about/news/movies-at-monuments/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://www.slideshare.net/brideyrael/secret-cinema-case-study-project-prometheus>

Introduction

1.1 Film Hub Wales Marketing Strategy Brief

Film Hub Wales (FHW) is one of nine hubs set up nationwide in 2013 by the British Film Institute's Film Audience Network (FAN) to promote British and independent film. Through Chapter, in Cardiff, its lead organisation, FHW, receives funding through the National Lottery to support film exhibition through its partner members, both core and associate, across Wales.

Its objectives are to:

- Develop an innovative, adventurous and significant cultural film programme Wales wide
- Celebrate Welsh language, heritage and culture, offering a platform for Welsh talent
- Increase access to specialist film, as defined by the BFI¹¹, through events, screenings and education opportunities
- Support a network of regional, national and international partnerships and share best practice, leading to a more sustainable film sector
- Share programming ideas, access, debate and information exchange via training and mentoring
- Research, understand and develop our audiences so that we can build and sustain interest in independent film
- Develop innovative approaches to digital technology to promote connectivity
- Identify and support rural venues in underserved / areas cultural poverty where audiences are hard to reach.

In order to meet these objectives, Film Hub Wales has commissioned a rural development strategic research project¹² and a major audience development report,

¹¹ "...most of the films released in the UK (and around the world) are big-budget mainstream titles from US studios, and often fairly straightforward in terms of storytelling, photography and even genre. A 'specialised' film is a bit different.

For example, it could be:

- a foreign language film with subtitles
- a documentary
- a classic or archive film
- hard to pigeonhole
- a film that tells a story in an unconventional, challenging way
- a film that is more experimental with cinematic techniques
- a film that makes you think, that isn't purely for entertainment."

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/lottery-funding-distribution/specialised-films>

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/lottery-funding-distribution/specialised-films>

¹² Bigger Picture Research, *Rural community film exhibition in Wales*, (June 2014)

Understanding our Audiences. It has also contracted this marketing study, which will be informed by both these pieces of research, and is to be updated in the light of the findings of *Understanding our Audiences* once this is delivered in March 2015.

The brief of this document is to conduct a scoping study of current marketing methods and frequency of programming cycles among a range of independent cinema exhibitors in Wales, so that Film Hub Wales can maximise its impact and ultimately be better placed to offer a range and choice of film for more people.

Drawing on the conclusions of this overview, the aim is to put in place a marketing strategy for the Hub to maximise the impact of nationwide seasons such as the BFI's second UK-wide 'blockbuster' season, Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder¹³, and to afford practical advice, resources and information to members as they carry out their regular screening programmes.

A sample of venues throughout Wales was selected for this study by FHW officers to afford a geographical spread from north and south to west that spans metropolitan, urban and rural locations. These vary in terms of economic deprivation (proximity to Community First areas) and include a variety of types of cinema exhibitors showing specialist film, ranging from community cinemas and film societies to cross-arts venues and film festivals.

As well as direct consultation with staff from Film Hub Wales and Ffilm Cymru Wales (formerly Film Agency Wales) this report takes into account what organisations like Sinemau Cymru, Cinema For All (formerly the British Federation of Film Societies), as well as the two touring cinema schemes that operate in Wales, Moviola, and Flicks in the Sticks (from September 2014) have to offer in terms of marketing advice and resources. Some of the selected organisations are affiliated to one or more of these,¹⁴

1.2 Cinema Exhibition in Wales

According to the rural community film exhibition report commissioned by FHW there is a proliferation of independent and community cinema exhibitors in Wales because of the relatively few areas of high population density in the country.¹⁵ Community cinemas, film societies, cross-arts venues and film festivals respond to a need for viewing a range of film titles on the big screen that are not fulfilled by commercial cinemas or multiplexes. A film society is normally comprised of members who attend screenings for film appreciation or discussion while a community cinema is organised by a village or town hall committee to provide regular film shows for recreational or social purposes.

This study looks at a cross-section of these types of cinema exhibition though the distinctions between them are by no means clear-cut. The Denbigh Film Club

¹³ <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi-days-fear-wonder>

¹⁴ *Rural community film exhibition in Wales*, 3.2.1, Table 9: Film organisation membership, p.p. 22-23

¹⁵ *Rural community film exhibition in Wales*, 1.1, Background, p7

committee, for example, when asked why they called themselves a ‘film club’ rather than a ‘film society’ replied that they consider themselves to be more of a community cinema. Theatr Gwaun in Fishguard, West Wales performs the functions of cross-arts venue but, with the withdrawal of funding by Pembrokeshire County Council, is almost entirely run by the community, with the exception of three members of part-time staff, for its own benefit.

Ffilm Cymru Wales (formerly Film Agency Wales) funds specialist film exhibition¹⁶ at seventeen cross-arts venues¹⁷ nationally on a three-year renewal cycle.

Funding is allocated according to three tiers:

- Tier 1 – requiring key performance indicators (KPIs) of a minimum of 40 specialist film titles, drawing 4,000 attendances annually. Venues within this tier are Chapter in Cardiff, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Theatr Mwdan in Cardigan and Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea.
- Tier 2 – requiring key performance indicators (KPIs) of a minimum of 20 specialist film titles, drawing 2,000 or more attendances annually.
- Incubation venues – new to independent or specialist film exhibition and seeking to develop audiences in this area. No minimum stipulations but these would expect to screen 5 specialist film titles per year.

No film societies or community cinemas, with the exception of the mobile cinema project through Film in Afan which is funded and managed by Ffilm Cymru, are subsidised by Ffilm Cymru Wales. Encouraging smaller film exhibitors to take greater risks in terms of the content they screen is an issue that Ffilm Cymru Wales, working in partnership with Film Hub Wales, seeks to address.

The following factors affect marketing practice:

- Geography – proximity to areas of high population density (metropolitan or urban).
- Nature of organisation – whether membership schemes (in the case of film societies or clubs) or incentives apply.
- Festivals – appeal to specialised audiences that are not exclusively local but can also be national or international.
- Demographic – factors such as age, gender, social grouping, relating to the type of organisation and its location, e.g. whether there is a high proportion of incomers or substantial tourist trade.
- Welsh language – whether the venue is situated within a predominantly Welsh-speaking area and this is reflected in its print and digital output.

Face-to-face meetings with representatives from each of the organisations selected were carried out between July and August 2014. With the exception of Llancarfan

¹⁶ The agency’s definition of ‘specialist film’ is based loosely on the BFI’s database though it exercises its own judgement, with a bias towards more challenging titles.

¹⁷ <http://www.ffilmcymruwales.com/index.php/en/see-welsh-film/venues>

Community Cinema, Abergavenny Film Society and the two film festivals involved, Abertoir and the Iris Film Prize, the interviews were carried out in situ and followed by a tour of the exhibition venues and their facilities.

In the case of Wyeside Arts Centre, information was collated through a longer-term relationship with the venue. I was commissioned to write a marketing report on the centre in 2012 and, the following year, to mentor its Marketing Officer, Miriam Hall, as she prepared an Audience Development Plan for Wyeside for 2014-17.

I have presented the findings from interviews in Section 2: Case Studies under the following headings:

- Background – history and future developments.
- Organisation – staffing or volunteering structure. Details of operation.
- Programming – the seasonal nature of this is significant, particularly in relation to print deadlines.
- Marketing – with a subsection on social media.
- Interaction with Film Hub Wales – existing or future relationships, requirements in terms of training and resources.

The results are analysed in Section 3 and, drawing on additional information from *Wales Goes Dark* (BFI Gothic) questionnaires and marketing templates, recommendations for a Wales-wide marketing approach are put forward in Section 4.

Details of interviewees and research conducted are supplied in Appendix 1.