20 Year Media's Reel Change: Building a Startup's Content Strategy from Social Data Intelligence

by

Marianne Elizabeth Nevada

Graduate Diploma in Editing, University of Melbourne, 2013

BA, McGill University, 2007

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Publishing

in the

Publishing Program

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© **Marianne Elizabeth Nevada 2017**

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2017

Approval

Name: **Marianne Elizabeth Nevada**

Degree: **Master of Publishing**

Title: **20 Year Media's Reel Change: Building a Startup's Content Strategy from Social Data Intelligence**

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. John Maxwell
Senior Supervisor
Director and Associate Professor,
Publishing Program

                                           _____

Dr. Hannah McGregor
Supervisor
Assistant Professor,
Publishing Program

                                           _____

Ryan Nadel
Industry Supervisor
Executive VP
20 Year Media, Vancouver, BC

                                           _____

Date Approved: March 14, 2017

Abstract

The film distribution chain has changed drastically in the past ten years. With the meteoric rise of home streaming services like Netflix, HBO Go and Amazon Prime, people are changing the ways they engage with movies. They prefer to consume films at home (at a reduced or no cost) through personal devices rather than regularly patronizing theatres and enjoying the cinema experience.

Vancouver startup 20 Year Media aimed to address this pressing issue by developing technologies that could aggregate film demand and deliver these insights to theatres so that they could program their screens and market their events more effectively. The idea is that this demand-driven model would resuscitate ticket sales and "make movies social again."

This report outlines my contributions to 20 Year Media as their Marketing Intern and later on, Content Specialist, from May 2014 to April 2015. It will present how I was able to establish and engage both moviegoer and exhibitor audiences for the innovative company with my flexible promotional content strategy. It will describe how I was able to consolidate marketing, public relations and community management roles with a focused and resourceful content plan and ongoing audience research.

Keywords: content strategy, content marketing, social data intelligence, excess capacity, social media, startups, film distribution, independent film

Mom and Pop, Giselle, Regi, Pat, Mark, Michael and Hamish – thank you for fuelling my imagination and passion for pop culture. I would have never ended up where I am without your influence. And you're also to blame for my trivial pursuit prowess. I love you guys.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Preface

In autumn 1939, the world was consumed by fear, anger and anxiety over Hitler and his allies' invasion throughout Europe. Starting with the capturing of Poland, the news that filtered into concerned citizens' radios each night revolved around military attacks, civilian slaughters and declarations of war against the enemy; there was no peaceful end at sight. But there was a temporary escape available to the masses.

The movie theatre, with its plush seats, velvet curtains and brilliant screens served as a safe haven, a distracting retreat for millions of terrorized citizens. In December 1939 directors Viktor Fleming, George Cukor and Sam Wood made cinematic history with the release of their sprawling historical drama, *Gone with the Wind*. Over three hours, the film tracked the triumphs and travails of the Southern belle Scarlett O'Hara (played by Vivien Leigh) from her beginnings as a spoiled debutante to a woman struggling against death and poverty during the Civil War. The film was a huge success at the box office and still remains the highest grossing film of all time (with inflation taken into account).

In his study of this milestone year in cinema, LA Times writer Jack Mathews recounts, "Americans were buying a phenomenal 80 million movie tickets a week....

Producers had more freedom and were inclined to indulge their most creative directors, those they could count on to turn out responsible films" (Mathews 1989). Every film was presented as a lauded, international event, a phenomenon that was best enjoyed with friends and family. Hollywood and the theatre industry thrived; studios and exhibitors studied their audiences closely and perfectly fed their desires for truth, meaning, community and harmony through moving pictures. Box office sales soared, and this decade is still regarded as the most successful era in film history.

Introduction

In 2016, the movie theatre business is in a troubled state; Bernstein Researcher Todd Juenger notes that approximately 93% of seats in most theatres go unsold, leading to the largest amount of excess capacity in any industry in America (Fritz 2012). The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) reports that "In 2014, the number of tickets sold in the U.S. and Canada declined by 6% to 1.27 billion (see appendix A), a 20-year low" (MPAA 2015). This demise stems from several reasons including rising ticket prices (and exhibitors reluctance to offer variable pricing based on consumer demand), but most notably from a shift in movie distribution models and the rise of mobile technologies that help audiences consume movies at home rather than in the theatres.

From around the 1960s to the early 2000s, studios would release a film, it would have a theatrical release and then be available on home video after 26 weeks. In recent years, especially with the sweeping popularity of services like Netflix and Amazon Prime, more films have had success bypassing the rigid and lengthy traditional model and releasing immediately on home streaming outlets. The MPAA even hypothesizes that "revenue from electronic home video viewing is expected to overtake box office revenue in 2017" (MPAA 2015).

Vancouver company 20 Year Media confronts the movie theatre industry's excess capacity problem by developing technologies that aggregate demand data and social intelligence. They aim to create platforms, beginning with WannaWatch.it, that convert moviegoers' tastes, locations, social networks and

online purchasing trends into curated film and theatre recommendations (20 Year Media 2013). This social data can then be shared with exhibitors (movie theatres) who can program their screens based on these insights. Rather than depending on lagging box office numbers, 20YM could provide theatres with leading indicators to help them plan their film calendars more proactively. While the technology is still being managed by programmers and developers (it is currently a manual process where the company can see the insights and they are relayed to theatre managers in a weekly or monthly summary), eventually, theatres will be able to view live results of demand data in a clean, simple dashboard. The theory is that this demand-driven model will allow theatres to be more responsive and boost ticket sales for theatres across America.

To leverage their plan, 20 Year Media acquired the New York company Emerging Pictures (EP) in February 2015. Leading up to this partnership, EP was facing bankruptcy due to the general slowing of ticket sales across independent theatres; 20 Year Media saw an opportunity to buy the company and use their assets far more effectively. Emerging Pictures is an all-digital film and alternate content network comprised of over 120 theaters throughout the United States. They are an integral link between theatres and large movie distribution companies like Sony Pictures Classics, IFC, The Orchard, Magnolia and TwC-Radius; EP uses their advanced digital server (replacing physical shipments of film reels) to quickly and cost-efficiently deliver sought-after independent films to local screens. The acquisition meant that 20 Year Media would have a large audience base (the EP network) to test their data aggregating applications and access to more specialized film content (including foreign, experimental, musical, documentary and theatre movies) to satisfy the diverse tastes of audiences across America.

My role as 20 Year Media's Marketing Intern and eventually, Content Specialist, was to sift through the social data intelligence on WannaWatch.it and our social media platforms, match these insights to the movie content we had in our

network and develop a promotional content and social marketing strategy for the company. This included managing, writing and publishing the WannaWatch.it and Emerging Pictures' blogs, curating and sending weekly newsletters to exhibitors, creating all social media content, programming select theatres, general exhibitor support and composing marketing strategies for film releases and community events.

This report will outline my contributions to 20 Year Media as their Marketing Intern and later on, their Content Specialist, from May 2014 to April 2015. It will present how I was able to establish and engage both moviegoer and exhibitor audiences for the company with my flexible promotional content strategy. It will describe how a Content Specialist is a vital figure in any startup; particularly in micro teams, this person can consolidate marketing, public relations and community management roles with a focused and resourceful content plan and ongoing audience research. Moreover, this study demonstrates how social data driven content paired with live client support is critical for gaining user loyalty, sustaining a vibrant independent industry and preserving the magic of the movie theatre experience.

Chapter 1.   It's a Startup Life

1.1. Start and Disrupt

Vancouver presently hosts a burgeoning tech community; it is the breeding ground for innovative forces like Hootsuite, Slack, Mobify and Later (formerly Latergramme), publishing platforms including Quiet.ly, ingenious food delivery programs Food.ee and Enroot and hundreds more tech-savvy entrepreneurs. All these companies have simplified bulky tasks, data transfer and processes with their clean, user-friendly technologies and round-the-clock customer service.

Vancouver startups and tech incubators are predominantly nestled in historic Gastown. Bill Tam, the President and CEO of the B.C. Technology Industry Association argues that startups' close proximity to each other increases the chances of mentorship and collaboration. Tam believes, "Many of the people leading Vancouver's new tech giants are keen to help budding entrepreneurs grow and thrive. They are very active in trying to ensure they can translate or transfer some of the expertise, the connections, the customer linkages, to the next generation of startups" (Hemmadi 2015).

The spirit of healthy competition and professional consortium grows each year in Vancouver. The CBC reports that British Columbia "boasts more than 600 digital media companies, employing about 16,000 people and generating $2.3 billion in annual sales, according to the commission" (Burgmann 2014). Ryan Holmes, the Founder and CEO of Hootsuite who bore witness to the meteoric rise of tech startups in Vancouver, understands the threat of Canada's brain drain (Silicon

Valley still remains the leader in capital and talent). But he maintains that, "In a few years' time, Vancouver will be flush with tech capital and brilliant people gunning to build the next Facebook, Twitter and Hootsuite" (Burgmann 2014).

This was the arena I entered when I began my marketing internship at 20 Year Media. Our original team of seven (comprised of two executives, two graphic and user experience designers, a developer, a marketing expert and myself) shared a corner at Launch Academy, Vancouver's leading startup hub. Our immediate goal was to "Make movies social again." We were determined to create an advanced technology platform that would collect social data and deliver accurate movie recommendations and theatre locations to our WannaWatch.it users. We wanted to solve the movie industry's excess capacity problem just as our startup peers at Uber, Airbnb and Lyft had done so successfully in their respective fields. We had the funding, the team, the technology and the startup community support in place; I was tasked with finding us an appropriate promotional content and engagement strategy that would rally an audience.

1.2. The Launch Academy

20 Year Media first set up shop in Gastown's Launch Academy, one of the largest accelerator hubs in Vancouver. Founded in 2012, the collaborative business has incubated over 400 early stage startups, nurtured a community of over 750 entrepreneurs and raised a collective $85 million dollars. During 20 Year Media's two-year tenancy in the academy (before claiming their own space three blocks south), the vibrant setting housed teams that were working on health, ICT, fintech, science, music and transportation applications. Launch Academy's portfolio boasted companies including the experimental educational platform Riipen, the virtual running partner Rungo, publishing tool AR Builder, anime social network Otaku

Seek, cash flow forecasting app Mentio, fundraising facilitator Change Heroes and dozens more innovators.

In 2014, 20 Year Media seemed to have the only stake in the film space at Launch Academy. This was slightly baffling considering how many opportunities for growth existed in this industry. The stage was set for our team to become, as our founders Mark Rutledge and Ryan Nadel put it, "a world leader in unlocking value in the excess capacity of the motion picture business through the use of demand data and social intelligence."

1.3.   The Indie Movement

Before I began my internship at 20 Year Media, their executives, including serial entrepreneur and entertainment lawyer Mark Rutledge, digital producer Ryan Nadel and renowned angel investor Michael Edwards and their contracted developers and programmers, had already put in months of audience research via online user testing and industry analysis. What they uncovered was illuminating and promising. It appeared that the cause of falling movie ticket sales wasn't a matter of consumers' disinterest in the theatre experience or independent movies. If anything, audiences' were watching more films and diversifying their tastes at an exponential rate. Prominent film critic Roger Ebert conjectured:

> Box-office tracking shows that the bright spot in 2011 was the performance of indie, foreign or documentary films. On many weekends, one or more of those titles captures first-place in per-screen average receipts. Yet most moviegoers outside large urban centers can't find those titles in their local gigantiplex. Instead, all the shopping center compounds seem to be showing the same few overhyped disappointments. Those films open with big ad campaigns, play a couple of weeks, and disappear.

The myth that small-town moviegoers don't like "art movies" is undercut by Netflix's viewing results; the third most popular movie on Dec. 28 on Netflix was *Certified Copy,* by the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami . . . . In fourth place, French director Alain Corneau's *Love Crime*. In fifth, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, but the subtitled Swedish version.

The message I get is that Americans love the movies as much as ever. It's the theaters that are losing their charm. Proof: theaters thrive that police their audiences, show a variety of titles and emphasize value-added features. The rest of the industry can't depend forever on blockbusters to bail it out. (Ebert 2011)

It was clear that we were dealing with was an inventory and demand mismatch. Inventory was rapidly increasing and becoming more readily available online and accommodated audiences' varying tastes better than the theatres could. 20 Year Media's solution to this dilemma was to "capitalize on excess capacity by aggregating consumer demand for film content and delivering that content in a frictionless manner, beginning with theatres" (20YM 2015). The opportunity presented itself best in smaller, independent theatres that lacked funding and strong technological infrastructures but were widely regarded as beacons of art, diversity and culture.

1.4. Confronting Excess Capacity

The increase in online movie viewership and the inventory/demand mismatch continues to create a more gaping hole in movie theatre sales. To reiterate, up to 93% of theatre seats are unsold particularly on weekdays, effectively wasting the earning potential of fully equipped screens. As a result, several smaller, locally run theatres are closing their doors, yet big box cineplexes that have the advertising backing of blockbuster-churning studios continue to grow. The MPAA recorded, "In 2014, there were more than 40,000 screens in the U.S. . . . The majority of screens (84%) were located at venues with eight or more screens. The number of screens at venues with seven or fewer screens continued to decline, despite an overall increase in the number of screens" (MPAA 2014).

20 Year Media aimed to reverse this trend and fortify independent theatres by adding a layer of collaborative consumption to the business. As Ebert observed, the thirst for diverse, international, provocative film is more and more pervasive amongst today's movie lovers. We had to build the interface that would deliver the right films to nearby theatres at the right time and develop a targeted marketing and content strategy that would reach these prospective audiences.

In their study on this generations' sharing economy, The Economist argues that a collaborative consumption model works best when you have "lumpy" goods complemented by a social technology component. Airbnb and RelayRides are perfect examples of businesses that turn bulky goods and excess capacity into profit-generating investments. The publication confirms:

Such "collaborative consumption" is a good thing for several reasons. Owners make money from underused assets. Airbnb says hosts in San Francisco who rent out their homes do so for an average of 58 nights a year, making $9,300. Car owners who rent their vehicles to others using RelayRides make an average of $250 a month; some make more than $1,000. Renters, meanwhile, pay less than they would if they bought the item themselves, or turned to a traditional provider such as a hotel or car-hire firm. It is not surprising that many sharing firms got going during the financial crisis. (The Economist 2013)

To thrive (or at this point, survive), independent theatres needed to incorporate a similar more responsive, flexible, engaging programming method to differentiate themselves from the big box cineplexes and resume attracting audiences. 20 Year Media projected that incorporating the collaborative consumption principles to this brick and mortar business could revive ticket sales. Our team was prepared to support these theatres as they adopted this new layer of social intelligence technology.

1.5. Social Data Intelligence and WannaWatch.it

My immediate task at 20 Year Media was to dive deep into audience research; I would need to find out which movies people wanted to watch in the theatres and what sort of incentives would take them outside of their homes and away from their personal devices to view them. For the first six months in my role, the company spent most of its efforts developing WannaWatch.it; at the time, it was primarily being marketed as a movie social network for audiences. Rather than being a film encyclopedia like the International Movie Database (IMDB), a fundraising platform

like Tugg, or a review portal like Rotten Tomatoes, WannaWatch.it focused on providing users with curated lists based on location, interests and social circles. WannaWatch.it users would create an account where they could log all their movie preferences. They could do so by hovering over the movie posters on the page and clicking on one of three options; "wanna see it," "seen it," and "don't wanna." With this information, our aggregating platform would deliver appropriate films to their feeds. They could discover these new films and "create an event" by inviting friends on the WannaWatch.it network to these movie screenings. WannaWatch.it events were the equivalent of Facebook group events or group chats, where invitees could coordinate which movie they all wanted to see and find the nearest theatre to watch it together.

We really wanted to drive home the message that movies were a social event best experienced in front of theatres' floor-to-ceiling, high-definition screens. This was still a major advantage over watching films on small TV sets, laptops, or worse yet, mobile phones. Additionally, our overarching motto, "Make movies social again" argued that the community aspect of cinemas was a crucial value underestimated by apps like Netflix and other home streaming services.

WannaWatch.it eventually evolved into a "social ticketing promotional and sales platform used by Emerging Pictures exhibitors and film festival partners" (20YM 2015). However, what the earliest iteration of WannaWatch.it provided was live insights into the demands of moviegoers across several states and provinces in North America. Once there was a steady flow of this social data, the company could further develop the exhibitor end of WannaWatch.it and prove to theatre managers that this geotargeted information could be delivered in a clean, seamless interface and could help them program their screens far more effectively. Digital media expert Julie Hong from the social media analytics company, Talkwalker describes how much of today's businesses benefit from the guidance of social intelligence. She explains, "The information tsunami comes in all shapes and sizes from multiple

channels, so the ability to integrate data is invaluable to a modern enterprise whose decisions depend on its public's opinions" (Hong 2016).

User insights defined the infant version of WannaWatch.it's business methodology; therefore, it was integral to the business' promotional content strategy. As Hong describes, never has a generation been so willing to share their personal tastes and insights, and never in the history of the world has this been information been so readily available (Hong 2016). She was absolutely correct in describing this phenomenon as an information tsunami; the most difficult part as a content specialist was finding qualitative data from the WannaWatch.it platform and all our social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr) then composing collateral content (blog posts, Facebook statuses, Instagram photos, Pinterest boards) that would inform and engage both movie audiences and exhibitors. To help build the profile of the company (in both the film and startup worlds), I would have to customize a content strategy that would simultaneously be peer-to-peer (P2P) and business-to-business (B2B).

Chapter 2. Engage

2.1. The Social Medium is the Message

"Engaged audiences are a cornerstone in the foundation of a strong arts ecosystem."
- Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin

When 20 Year Media launched WannaWatch.it, they were starting from a user base of zero. There was no carryover of users from a previous version or iteration. The most logical way to draw both moviegoers and exhibitors to the site was to build WannaWatch.it's presence on popular social media channels. To optimize each social media account, a very utilitarian approach was applied to every platform. Each medium would have a specific purpose that would complement 20 Year Media's main goal to "make movies social again," and encourage visitors to support local movie theatres.

This mindset was informed by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan's most influential work, *Understanding Media.* McLuhan argues, "The medium shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan 1964). I adopted this outlook in my social content strategy; I understood that each social media channel would encourage a specific type of interaction and attract different audiences. The point of holding different social accounts was to have several touchpoint options so that we could cater to as wide an audience as possible. I would have to assess the power and potential of each social media platform and wield them differently to derive different types of valuable engagement with WannaWatch.it's content.

WannaWatch.it's Tumblr blog was used to establish the site's voice; Tumblr was the ideal forum because of its ability to integrate all types of media (film, music, photos, quotes, essays) and because of its large network that had viral sharing potential. Users on the site could easily search for popular topics using hashtags, and they could also subscribe to our blog and get a clear picture of the company's film content, current happenings and promotions. The goal was to paint WannaWatch.it as the authority on groundbreaking, independent films. This was executed by short, punchy reviews of films that flew under the box office radar, movie release announcements, themed film listicles (see appendix B), movie trailers, and spotlights on interesting movie events happening in North America that I would collect, write and publish on an almost daily basis. I would always include links to local independent theatres that were playing any of these films or hosting these events to move traffic and ticket sales their way. At this point, that was the best way to gain the attention of both audiences and exhibitors and prove our value on the P2P and B2B fronts. We wanted to prove that our presence could convert movie fan traffic on our social channels into theatre ticket sales. Once I developed the independent film pundit voice for WannaWatch.it, the next step was to apply this to our different social media channels.

With a clearer picture of our audience composition and our online voice set, Twitter was most effective for user support and live conversations concerning upcoming films, new movie technologies or movie trivia. Due to the speed and ephemeral nature of this platform, this was the space I used most to interact with followers on all things current, and ultimately, fleeting. Our team coined the term "candy bowl content" for twitter posts; these were film tidbits that were fun, easy and quick to digest.

As a visual app, Instagram was used to reflect the sophisticated, international and diverse imagery from WannaWatch.it's film database. As a purveyor of quality

foreign, experimental and avant-garde independent films, we focused on clean, crisp movie stills rather than over-commercialized blockbuster posters. We shared high-definition photos of independent theatres, vintage seats and concession stands. We also highlighted the modern, minimalistic design of the WannaWatch.it website; our Instagram account would establish how we differ from competitors (such as IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes, Tugg, etc.) and direct followers over to our site.

Facebook served as our running social media RSS feed; all our social accounts linked to Facebook, so it gave followers a comprehensive view of our company. As soon as we started investing in promoted posts, Facebook also became our main method of online advertising (via boosted posts and promoted events). In the next phase of WannaWatch.it, The People's Choice Series (which I will cover shortly), Facebook became pivotal in driving ticket sales with its event creation functionality.

2.2. Turning Online Engagement into Theatre Attendance

With our Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter accounts in place, the number of our followers and likes were important, but we were more interested in gaining quality engagement. We wanted to create meaningful conversations on our social channels; we needed specific feedback regarding the films that would do well in theatres and the motivators that would lure users to art-house, independent spaces on a more regular basis.

A great reference for how to achieve quality engagement was by studying other independent arts businesses' methods in North America. In 2011, Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin of Wolfbrown (a leading advisor to NGOs, public agencies and charities; they bring unconventional solutions to the nonprofit sector's most critical challenges*)* were commissioned by the San Francisco Foundation and Grant for the

Arts to assess how arts organizations engage audiences in performance and exhibit experiences. Their study paid close attention to the dominating role of technology; Brown and Ratzkin explain, "Arts groups . . . are developing sophisticated online engagement strategies that serve to build community and prolong the arts experience. While a growing body of exemplary practice is emerging, many arts groups are still struggling with how to make the online experience more interactive and less of a one-way conversation" (Brown and Ratzkin 2011).

The addition of our social media channels definitely increased our following on the WannaWatch.it site; our user base grew and we had more people clicking on movie posters and divulging their preferences. However, the social media conversations were rather disappointing; a like on a movie review post or a photo gave us no indication whether or not these would translate to indie theatre ticket sales. Due to social media algorithms that prioritized paid posts and advertisements on users' feeds, our social efforts were getting little to no visibility.

Finally, the user feedback we did receive from movie fans mentioned that they couldn't see how their likes and votes influenced what theatres would program. The social content plan was still operating as a one-way conversation. Users needed a more transparent view of how WannaWatch.it was serving their needs. They needed more rewards for sharing their opinions and preferences. Our solution to this was the introduction of our site's voting mechanism and our pilot program, The People's Choice Series.

2.3. The People's Choice Series

Two months after establishing our social media presence, it was clear that generating online conversations on WannaWatch.it and our social platforms weren't enough to encourage ticket sales at movie theatres. WannaWatch.it needed a more distinct, exciting and interactive feature that no other movie website was offering. Brown and Ratzkin expound on this idea:

> Why this dramatic shift? In part, the increased focus on engagement is a response to broad social trends and changes in the preferences and tastes of cultural consumers. Expectations for interactivity and interconnectivity, fueled by social media, are the "new normal." As a growing number of consumers demand more and more intense, multi-sensory, and customizable experiences, arts groups find it more and more difficult to satisfy everyone with one experience. (Brown and Ratzkin 2011)

With the creative direction of one of our company's founders Ryan Nadel, our designers, developers and programmer developed a voting feature on our site. In partnership with indie theatres, we could allow users to vote which films they wanted to see on local screens. This pilot program would allow us to see how movie theatre sales and site engagement would be affected if we put the power of programming into our users' hands.

The user experience would be as follows:
1. WannaWatch.it creates a movie event hosted by a movie theatre
2. We would work in collaboration with a theatre to come up with a movie night theme (e.g. Halloween in October, Oscar-nominated films in February, etc.)
3. Together, three films (available through distributors) are selected under this theme
4. Users can vote which one of these films are screened on the specified date
5. The film with the most votes gets screened

This bold move was a milestone in 20 Year Media's trajectory; it was a clear disruption of the typical film distribution process. In an interview with Vancouver's Georgia Straight, Nadel pointed out, "Exhibitors are just taking what studios give them and putting them on their screens … What we're trying to do is aggregate the demand around specific theatres and then match that demand with an audience and a screen" (da Silva 2014).

WannaWatch.it was effectively adding a Video-on-Demand element to the movie theatre experience; it was an ingenious way of applying the technologically advanced, collaborative consumption layer to the brick and mortar business. We hypothesized that the voting feature would simultaneously be a more reliable tracking system for ticket sales and a more empowering experience for audiences. If the number of votes for the winning film were close to actual tickets bought for the screening, then this would be a very valuable tool that we could market for exhibitors.

In terms of producing promotional content, the voting platform gave my social media posts and blog articles a more unique and concrete direction. Sharing how we were putting programming power in audience's hands was novel, slightly controversial and distinct from competitors. There was now a firm call to action that readers could latch onto: if they shared their film opinions on WannaWatch.it and social media platforms, rallied enough support and gained enough votes for preferred films, they would actually be able to program the films on their favourite theatres.

The energy throughout the company spiked dramatically in this next phase; we were about to officially test our newest voting feature and revamped messaging with the People's Choice Series in Vancouver's beloved Rio Theatre. Prior to this development, we had been so focused on the app development and moviegoer

engagement i.e. likes, comments and feedback via WannaWatch.it and our social media channels. We were now opening ourselves to the reviews and criticisms of news outlets (including Vancouver weeklies and entertainment blogs) and throwing our first WannaWatch.it branded event (the prototype for many to come). We were now actively broadcasting the value and uniqueness of WannaWatch.it and proving its direct impact on theatre ticket sales.

The Rio Theatre was an ideal location to test WannaWatch.it's voting feature. For the past 70 years, the Rio has been one of East Vancouver's cultural hubs. It hosts first-run, second-run and cult cinema screenings and is renowned for themed nights including Midnight Movies of Cult Classics, Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Animation Festival, and much more. They are also a premier venue for music, theatre and comedy events such as the Vancouver International Comedy Festival and the International Burlesque Show. Even with their loyal following (their Facebook page boasts 18,393 likes and they have 12,500 Twitter followers), they too face the reality of dwindling ticket sales like the majority of independent movie theatres throughout North America. On some weekday evenings, they've had 10-20 people buy tickets for a 420 capacity theatre.

20 Year Media decided to rent the Rio Theatre for one weekday evening per month over the summer of 2014. We would co-market the event and use our voting platform to dictate which films would play at the Rio on these designated nights. In addition to my social media and community management role, I would now also be in charge of the public relations and marketing of the series. My knowledge of our film database, users' responses (on WannaWatch.it and social media channels) informed the marketing strategy, press releases and promotional posts I composed in the month leading up to the People's Choice Series. I was inadvertently creating templates that future exhibitor's could use for the promotion of their own events.

2.4. Case Study 1: Philip Seymour Hoffman Night

The first screening of the People's Choice Series took place on May 26, 2014 just weeks after the passing of prolific actor, Philip Seymour Hoffman. In honour of his life and work, viewers would be able to choose which of his most famous films they'd like to see at the Rio. The choices were the ensemble comedy *Boogie Nights*, the dark drama *Synechdoche, New York* and the chilling biopic *Capote* that earned Hoffman an Academy Award for Best Actor in 2005.

Voting opened on the People's Choice Series event page on WannaWatch.it on May 12. Users could vote once for the film of their choice by creating a free WannaWatch.it account. To promote the voting process, I created weekly posts on Tumblr to hype up the event and shared pivotal scenes from each film to inform votes. For Instagram, stills from Hoffman's films were shared, we tweeted quotes from his films as teasers for the event (and linked to the voting page) and we created a promoted Facebook event to boost and track attendance numbers. We would then average out the votes on WannaWatch.it and Facebook attendance numbers to predict box office numbers for the Rio.

It was critical for this first night of the People's Choice Series to gain media attention; if newspapers, magazines and blogs found our voting platform newsworthy, then this would be a) affirmation that we were carving out a unique space for ourselves in the startup and film worlds and b) crucial advertising of our website for exhibitors who could use WannaWatch.it as a promotional tool in the future.

I reached out to 20 of Vancouver's newspapers and local blogs, provided them with an introductory email and the press release I wrote (see Appendix C); I was ecstatic to gain substantial features in three of these outlets. The series was

19

picked up by the Georgia Straight (Vancouver's most prominent lifestyle, news and entertainment weekly), Inside Vancouver (a local's guide to the city), and the Snipe News (the go-to for Vancouver music and film news). The Straight's writer Michelle da Silva interviewed Ryan Nadel, delving deeper into the innovations that WannaWatch.it brings to the movie and local theatre industry. Inside Vancouver and the Snipe News both explored Hoffman's body of work and talked about the unique aspect that voting brought to this screening. These were all promising endorsements of our technology.

Our media exposure and social promotion led to 67 votes on the WannaWatch.it event page and 43 confirmed attendees on the Rio's Facebook event page. Averaging these two out, we predicted that 55 people would attend the screening (the reasoning behind this formula was that we figured several of the votes on WannaWatch.it would be the same people saying they were attending the event on Facebook). Being maybe too optimistic, I predicted that half of that audience would be comprised of WannaWatch.it voters due to the novelty of the crowd-driven platform.

On May 26, we announced that *Boogie Nights* would screen at the Rio. To be safe, the theatre contacted the distributors and had permission to screen any of the three, but ended up paying the rights to just *Boogie Nights*. After a last minute social media blast that announced the winner and the ticket price of $6, it was time to head to the Rio to see what our box office numbers were like.

We found that the audience was comprised of 58 members in total on a Monday night, about 14% of the theatre's capacity, which is double the industry average on slower evenings. However, we verified by checking emails at the door that only a third of the people at the event (17 in total) were voters on the website, which may not sound like much at first. But if the voting platform could consistently

encourage a third of our voters to attend a screening (an extra 5% of the theatre's capacity), that would be a moderate win for the Rio.

Our team accumulated valuable lessons from this initial, small-scale test. While we had hoped that more voters would attend the screening, the summer weather notoriously negatively impacts the turnout at the Rio's screenings; audiences understandably would prefer to be outside on those rare days of Vancouver sun rather than in a dark theatre. Additionally, the location of the Rio may have been a deterrent for consumers spread across Greater Vancouver, being situated further east rather than downtown.

The energy at the theatre was very encouraging; feedback at the door from voters and walk-ins was that they were intrigued by the fan-driven aspect of the series. We screened our first WannaWatch.it animated preview before the screening and it prompted most of the non-voting audience to sign up for our monthly newsletter at the door. Having this in-person data from our first WannaWatch.it event definitely impacted our site's user experience and content strategy moving forward.

2.5. Case Study 2: Kevin Smith Night

Following the Philip Seymour Hoffman night, our team worked quickly to release our next installment of the People's Choice Series—Kevin Smith night. Smith studied at the Vancouver Film School early in his career and was about to host an exclusive SModcast with his producing partner (and Canadian born) Scott Mosier at the Rio Theatre. We decided to leverage the press for this event and throw a Kevin Smith themed movie night leading up to the live podcast. The films up for voting were *Clerks*, *Mallrats* and *Dogma.*

The same social media and marketing strategy was utilized for this evening (Instagram posts, Tumblr hype, Facebook event), but we made some adjustments.

Firstly, our development and design team added a comments section to the WannaWatch.it voting page to add a more social aspect to the process. Secondly, I leveraged Twitter for most of the promotion; after canvassing their social accounts, it was clear that Kevin Smith and Scott Mosier are both very active on this platform and have huge followings (Smith has over 3 million followers and Scott has over 86,000). Rather than focusing on media and blog PR hits, the goal was to get Smith and Mosier to reply to or at least retweet our event to their audience and hopefully boost ticket sales.

These adjustments seemed to be highly successful during the voting phase; we had a huge influx of social data from the WannaWatch.it voting page and from Twitter. The comments all raved about these film choices and there were some very adamant Kevin Smith supporters sharing their views. On Twitter, Mosier and Smith unfortunately did not retweet the event, but the Rio also boasts a loyal following. They released tweets about Kevin Smith night and their most popular one received 198 favourites, 55 retweets, and 20 comments. This is incredible exposure; we gained about 10 followers in the span of a day (prior to this, we were averaging about two new followers every two days).

During this phase, I also began to formalize a WannaWatch.it Playbook. The intention was to share this with exhibitors so that they could throw their own spin on a People's Choice Series using the WannaWatch.it platform and suggested promotional methods and materials. It included a step-by-step guide on how to come up with a successful theme night; how to create an event on WannaWatch.it; how to compose press releases; plus Facebook post, blog post, Instagram and Twitter best practices.

A week before the event, the votes were tallied and *Dogma* won by a landslide. We had 46 votes and 39 confirmed attendees on Facebook, so we predicted that 42 people would attend the screening. In actuality, only 28 people

arrived which was disheartening. However, several of the comments on Twitter were from people who did not live in Vancouver, but were keen to attend this type of event if it was in their town. So accessibility had a great deal to do with the low attendance numbers. Additionally, our first two movie nights were both 19+ events, which would significantly shrink our audience pool. Moving forward, we would pick theme nights that were more inclusive. Finally, the Kevin Smith night was held on a Tuesday which was in direct competition with discount nights at cineplexes that offer first-run films and blockbusters. These were all valuable insights that were introduced into the WannaWatch.it playbook and were extremely vital when we started to become more of an exhibitor-facing application.
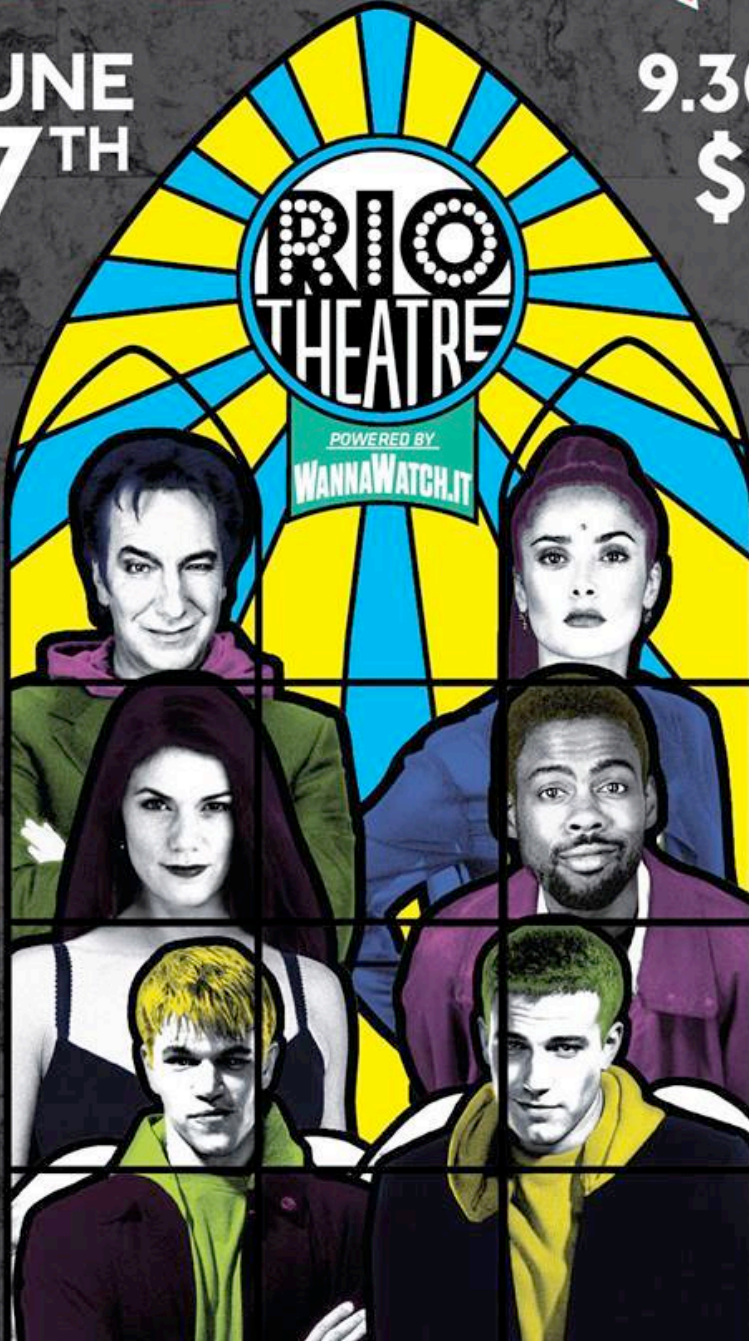
2.6. Stop and Recalibrate

Completing the WannaWatch.it Exhibitor Playbook was an eye-opening moment in my role. It became more and more apparent that the group that needed more support and resources was the film venues, or exhibitors, not the moviegoers. My original social media efforts for WannaWatch.it were focused on drawing in moviegoer audiences and responding to their needs, and this was crucial for gathering social data intelligence and viewer preferences initially. The viewer engagement re-affirmed existing studies that prove there is a thirst for film diversity. Audiences weren't satisfied with just the commercial film offerings and blockbusters at multi-screen cineplexes. As the People's Choice series demonstrated, they had a great interest in being a part of the programming experience. Finally and most importantly, audiences wanted to see local businesses thrive.

I came to the realization that I was going about my promotional content strategy from the wrong angle. My strategy was operating under the belief that raising the profile of WannaWatch.it on social media would attract users, and then we could divert these users to their closest independent theatres. However, from the People's Choice series, the greatest takeaway from audience feedback was that theatres are perceived as hallmarks of a community's vibrant culture. To fill their seats, they need to be leading the charge on this audience-driven movie screening vision. WannaWatch.it would be a tool to support their growth but didn't have enough of a following to completely drive their ticket sales.

20 Year Media could provide more value to the movie theatre industry by providing exhibitors with behind-the-scenes marketing and programming support, social data intelligence and ticketing technologies. We needed better, customized solutions, film content and technologies to empower theatres and them to multiply

their audiences. We needed to make the logistical parts of their jobs (including acquiring films from distributors, selling tickets, programming their screens) easier so that they could spend more time engaging audiences and encouraging ticket sales.

Chapter 3.   Keep Indie Alive

3.1. The Game Changer: Enter Emerging Pictures

In May 2015, the startup 20 Year Media acquired made a tremendous tactical move; after months of research and negotiations, they acquired New York-based Emerging Pictures, an all-digital film and alternate content network of US theatres. A combination of government funding and investor resources made this groundbreaking deal possible. Nadel explained the unconventional nature of this investment to the tech innovation publication, Betakit. Most acquisition stories usually involve a larger, established company set on purchasing the talent and technologies from a fresh startup to augment their business. But 20 Year Media's narrative wasn't like most stories:

> Ninety-eight percent of the time, the acquisition goes in the other direction, so it's an odd scenario. But for us, making this move now made sense. Emerging Pictures has been a real pioneer on the digital distribution side of things. That was a big missing piece for helping us reach our goal of helping theatres give audiences the content that they want to see. (Narvey 2015)

EP is a cost-effective link for theaters to major independent film distributors. With their advanced digital film server, they are able to sub-distribute quality film, festival and live theatre content to their network of over 120 independent theatres. Timing was crucial in this negotiation. In recent years, EP had been facing financial problems due to decreasing ticket sales throughout the country. This acquisition meant that 20 Year Media could reinforce their data-driven and crowd consumption

technologies with a repository of film content and distributor relationships, and deliver these services seamlessly to their new network of theatres. The goal was to resuscitate EP's business and increase movie demand nation-wide through this partnership.

20 Year Media effectively acquired a group of exhibitors that could utilize their advanced technologies to boost ticket sales significantly. What we had now was a constantly growing repository of cultural content (leveraging the relationships and expertise of our new VP of Sales and Distribution, Ryan Markowitz), a network of theatres to work with, and technologies to predict consumer demand and create sales and marketing efficiencies for theatres (to draw in audiences).

In his interview with Anne Thompson from Indiewire, 20 Year Media's CEO Mark Rutledge outlines how this acquisition would change the movie distribution model:

> With our new tools, we'll be removing the friction on the marketing side by putting the data in the hands of the exhibitors and completely automating the process from booking all the way through delivery. This new technology will give audiences a wider selection of movies, and generate higher box office returns for both theatre owners and content creators. (Thompson 2015)

The introduction of our tools would be extremely beneficial for several theatres running on small staffs; many of them don't have dedicated marketing specialists, web designers, social media managers and programmers to negotiate film distribution deals, manage the theatre, collect movie marketing data and transform them into full promotional campaigns.

In the first few weeks after the acquisition, I sent courtesy emails and made calls to approximately 15 EP Network theatres to let them know how this change

would affect them; it was integral to my role to hear their feedback, concerns, recommendations and areas where EP could improve. Several of the overloaded and overworked theatre managers were open and appreciative of data-driven technologies that could help them streamline their many duties and give them better programming insights. On the other hand, there were managers that were resistant to the change and worried that their customers who had been visiting them for years wouldn't appreciate the interference of a third party. They worried that our upgrades may interfere with their character, branding and community perception.

We were working with theatres all across the board in terms of technology adoption; some had robust social media presences and were using online ticketing vendors and PR companies, while others were single screen cinemas or cafes that didn't have a website, and a few of them still only accepted cash for ticket sales. In order for the EP network to embrace and reap the benefits of our assistance, they needed to know that 20 Year Media's technology upgrades were optional and that we could tailor our applications and services to their needs.

My role as a social media manager dramatically changed to an account management and exhibitor support position. I was now responsible for producing content, film recommendations and marketing strategies for exhibitors; it was a far more client facing, B2B, hands-on service role than my previous responsibilities. It was an opportunity to learn about the intricacies of the independent theatre world, the personal side of the business (which couldn't be captured by social data) and the politics between distributors, studios and exhibitors.

The content I produced was no longer solely promotional material for the company (more specifically, WannaWatch.it), but now included templates, tips and tools that directly served theatres. These included press release writing guides, monthly newsletters with programming recommendations, a comprehensive social

31

media guide and full monthly programming for some theatres. Our new relationships with film distributors also brought in new films weekly that drove my content output. With this increased breadth of work, it was necessary to find technologies that would streamline and optimize our company's internal and external communications.

3.2. Managing Content Flow in a Growing Network

With Emerging Pictures theaters becoming 20 Year Media's new primary audience, not only did our marketing content need to adapt, but the media and schedule of output also needed to be drastically revamped. With WannaWatch.it, I released blog posts weekly and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter posts daily according to the latest social media trends; in 2015, social media specialists insisted that 1-3pm was the optimal time to post and generate shares (Patel 2015). This was based on the fact that people would be on their lunch breaks at this time or winding down from a busy morning and more prone to look through their feeds.

After EP's acquisition, I was given control of their social media accounts; I immediately followed all of the EP network theatres and studied their most recent posts to get a sense of their preferred content and tone. When I resumed posting for the EP social accounts, I stuck to the 1-4pm schedule; but rather than publishing entertaining listicle features or random film trivia, all my posts were now positioned as resources to improve theatres' programming and marketing.

The Emerging Pictures blog was a content-rich space to discuss industry knowledge and distribution trends; they engaged with articles found in film-focused publications including Vulture, Indiewire and Screendaily. They grappled with the shifts of the film distribution model, breakthroughs in crowd participation and

critics' impacts on audience reception. I would also post 200-300 word reviews or previews on upcoming movies from our partnering distributors so that theatre manager's could already begin forecasting their programming schedules. Depending on exhibitors' engagement (or lack thereof) with these posts, I would tweak my strategy for the following week. It was a completely pragmatic approach to a content strategy; editorial schedules were built bi-weekly rather than months in advance to keep the posts consistently timely and relevant.

Facebook continued to be an avenue for promoting events. Our EP account shared the film events and screenings of exhibitors in our network; we wanted to showcase the diversity of our partnered theatres and their unique voices, marketing approaches and programming choices. Our Facebook page would serve as a collaborative learning tool for all our followers. Theatre staff could easily wander over to their peers' pages and see which movies were gaining traction in other locations. Facebook was also an effective medium to share the latest movie trailers for films we had recently added to our server to assist exhibitors with their programming.

Twitter remained the default for B2B conversations; it was a fantastic medium for sharing live updates regarding film releases and ticket sales. I also spent at least an hour day following film distributors' accounts and seeing if there were films in their catalogue that would resonate with the Emerging Pictures network. These recommendations would then go to our VP of Sales Ryan Markowitz in our New York office and he would determine if they were a good fit for the company. If he approved the selection, he would negotiate a deal with the distributor to add the film to our server. Markowitz would also be approached by distributors quite frequently, requesting that certain experimental, unconventional or under-marketed films be pitched to our network. In these cases, my colleague Lee Shorten and I would watch the proposed films, search for reviews and social traction on these features then recommend whether or not they should be included in our next

social media and newsletter blast. More often than not, they were added to give the EP theatres more programming options.

To maintain all of Emerging Pictures' social media accounts (while still regularly publishing audience-facing posts for WannaWatch.it), it was necessary to start employing social media dashboards to increase efficiency. Hootsuite became vital for scheduling Twitter and Facebook posts for both companies. Having been in close proximity to Later (formerly Latergramme) at Launch Academy, I made sure to integrate their app into my productivity; this was an excellent platform for scheduling post-dated Instagram posts (at the time, Hootsuite did not have the capability of scheduling Instagram posts, and Later specifically worked with Instagram). To ensure that our WannaWatch.it pages were still up to date and to ensure consistency between their content and the films available on Emerging Pictures, I refurbished EP posts for the WannaWatch.it audience. For example, I would still release listicles and trivia via Tumblr, but they would include Emerging Pictures films. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook were used to publish trailers, events or film preview posts that showcased films and theatres in the EP network.

3.3. Newsletters and High Fives

The most advantageous content upgrade that Emerging Pictures added to my workflow was the introduction of bi-weekly and monthly newsletters for exhibitors. With WannaWatch.it, we only sent out newsletters whenever a new feature or event was being released (which took place approximately every other month). At Emerging Pictures, newsletters were a vital, and really, the sole marketing link between the company and our theatres. The EP business relied on theatres requesting films from our server. Theatres pad a monthly 'membership' fee and a share of their box office sales for movies sub-distributed by EP.

Our newsletters needed to be sent to theatre managers every month with new, compelling content so that they could program their screens accordingly. Originally, Emerging Pictures was using an outdated platform called Net Atlantic (that often malfunctioned) to compose their newsletters. However, the limited design capabilities and weak tracking analytics encouraged us to transfer to MailChimp. Mailchimp's clean aesthetic, customizing potential and accurate reporting made it a clear winner.

In terms of of our tone and language, we updated the newsletters to be far more direct and editorial driven. We also were very intentional in how we ordered the releases in the newsletter; the films that had the best box office earning potential or were seasonally appropriate (according to reviews and industry experts) were placed at the top of the newsletter, then followed by more niche options. Once exhibitors received these newsletters, they would contact Lee Shorten, our community liaison, and he would process their film requests and ensure that the film and marketing assets were delivered to the exhibitors.

The more that we learned about our partnered theatres (their typical audiences, their peak times, their ticket sales), the more we were able to send out customized newsletters to different demographics in the network. For instance, we could pitch more midnight movie and horror options to university theatres or pop culture hubs like the Rio Theatre. But for more avant-garde exhibitors, we would pitch more weighty documentaries or International drama series. Crafting the perfect newsletter became a very challenging, calculated and rewarding responsibility. But it was the perfect exercise to learn how flexible our services needed to be for the wide range of theatres in our network (see appendix D).

3.4. Case Study 3: Theatre N programming vs. Geeksboro Ticketing

The most rewarding part of working with 20 Year Media was exchanging ideas with and supporting the incredible individuals keeping independent theatres alive in rural America. To give an idea of the amount of interaction and support that we provided these theatres, I'd like to draw on two specific examples: Theatre N in Wilmington, Delaware and the Geeksboro Coffeehouse Cinema in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Theatre N at Nemours is a single screen art-house cinema that opened in 2002; it revived the space formerly known as the Rialto which was Wilmington's only movie theatre up until 1982. It closed at this time and finally saw a second life with Theatre N's new management. Their primary audience was middle-aged professionals and families; films that performed well in this theatre were international dramas, family-friendly comedies and thought-provoking documentaries.

Their theatre manager maintained their website and social media channels but did few updates due to time limitations. She wanted to preserve the history and reputation of Theatre N (which was owned by the city of Wilmington), but also trusted that Emerging Pictures could bring in a bigger audience through diversified programming and technological updates. Ryan Nadel spoke to Betakit about this delicate balance that we needed to strike when working with exhibitors. He offered, "Movie theatres are over 150 years old and you have to work with the traditions and connections that are attached to that. At the same time, our approach lets our partners be more dynamic, connecting the theatre and the audience in a new way."(Narvey 2015)

The theatre was open to a partial site redesign, social media guidance, full theatre programming and the introduction of WannaWatch.it's new online ticketing platform (all administered by our 20 Year Media team). I would check in with their theatre manager on a bi-weekly basis to see how the programmed films were performing. Depending on her feedback, we would adjust the film selection for the following month. In terms of social media, initially, we provided them with the copy and assets for film promo (word for word including hashtags and handles). Slowly, we moved them towards using our best practices guide and templates so that they could manage their accounts more effectively on their own. Our talented designers created new images and headers to direct Theatre N's website visitors to their new WannaWatch.it online ticketing page to encourage pre-sales. Our aim was to show Theatre N where the opportunities were within their company and what technology gaps we could fill, and then provide them with the tools to improve. Overall, our platforms and services were very well received and we saw Theatre N becoming more cognizant and responsive to the data we provided them with.

Geeksboro Cinema is an extremely vibrant "hole in the wall" theatre in North Carolina; the screen is housed in a small coffeehouse that is packed on most nights. Their theatre manager designed their engaging website and creates all the promotional posters for their events. Despite their size and location, they attracted 17,500 Facebook followers. Their events range from free TV nights to late night horror movie showings. Films that performed well in this theatre were cult-classics, midnight movies, anime and sleeper hit indies. Their team was closely attuned to their community and needed little to no assistance from Emerging Pictures for social media and social data; they benefited most from our film digital server and new ticketing system designed and built by the 20 Year Media team. Each week, their manager would send a list of screening times, and my role was to post these on their ticketing page; it was a very simple and beneficial process for the theatre and our company.

The difference between these two theatres highlights an important aspect of the 20 Year Media and Emerging Pictures business model; it was extremely adaptable to the needs of independent businesses. The most important content creation skills that I picked up in working with these theatres were flexibility and quick problem solving. We could not apply blanket programming, market strategies or ticketing methods to all EP network theatres because they all had very specific needs. Exhibitor relations were becoming a more complex and labour intensive aspect for 20 Year Media. The company's next logical move was to find a more efficient and automated communications solution for theatre support in addition to their social data intelligence delivery.

Chapter 4.   A New Hope

4.1. The Next Frontier

By the summer of 2015, the entire 20 Year Media team was settled in their new roles following the Emerging Pictures acquisition; we were adding approximately three films a week from distributors to our server and gaining daily bookings from our EP theatre partners. To keep the network up to date on these changes, newsletters were being sent out almost once a week and up to six theatres had fully adopted our online ticketing system (a huge accomplishment considering the competition; Fandango, Brown Paper Tickets, and Dealflicks were popular options at the time). Admittedly, the social media output had slowed down to accommodate the growing need for one-to-one B2B customer support.

At this stage, the EP business was operating but still not profitable. In order for 20 Year Media and Emerging Pictures to grow, more theatres needed to adopt their applications; the team needed to give their services more structure. They had to more formally package their social data analysis platform and marketing materials so that exhibitors could clearly see the value added. In December 2015, a group of students from the Harvard Business School conducted an in-depth analysis of 20 Year Media's business handlings and came to similar conclusions:

> The most important resource to develop will be the company's social media marketing, ticket sales, and data analysis platform that will allow 20YM to not only determine where demand for a particular piece of content is

clustered, but also to effectively and inexpensively market that content to drive attendance . . . . With these resources in place, 20YM will need to offer a fully-integrated solution and make each part of its offering exclusive. Interdependence between content, theater network, and audience reach is what would generate value for 20YM's customers (e.g. theaters will not generate revenue if there is no content to show or if no one shows up to watch what is being shown). Thus, 20YM should not offer any parts of its solution a-la-carte. (Dashputre, Waxenberg, Zaborskiy 2015)

This was a fair critique of how 20 Year Media was introducing their services to exhibitors; to gain their trust and loyalty, we had been offering them our services piecemeal. As a result, the theatres couldn't see the bigger picture of how our technology worked. In fairness, the data analysis platform had not been fully developed yet, so it was not ready to share with exhibitors. But once that was marketable, exhibitors needed to see that it goes hand-in-hand with our prepared marketing materials and ticketing platform. As Dashputre et al. stress, there is an interdependence between all these types of content and "theatres will not generate revenue if there is no content to show or if no one shows up to what is being shown." To prove that our platforms would solve the movie industry's excess capacity problem, exhibitors needed to lean deeper into the technology and share its benefits with their audiences.

4.2. Final Recommendations

In the summer of 2015, I left my Content Specialist position at 20 Year Media to pursue full-time communications work with a start up retailer. In the last two weeks leading to my departure, 20 Year Media was exploring a partnership with the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival to help them sell tickets with the

WannaWatch.it platform and a co-distribution and promotion deal for the unauthorized Kurt Cobain biopic, *Soaked in Bleach.* In September 2015, 20 Year Media was acquired by Mobio Inc., a high-venture fund that invests in technology startups. They hoped to showcase 20YM's technologies through a platform called Strutta that connects brands with consumers, and raise the company's profile (Waddell 2015). With these developments, I was optimistic that 20YM would be able to expand their exhibitor following beyond the current Emerging Pictures network and move past WannaWatch.it's beta phase and into a more profitable stage for the business.

Unfortunately, I learned that in mid 2016, Emerging Pictures' distributor relations continued to slow down, causing 20 Year Media to temporarily downsize their team and operations. Presently, they are waiting for funding before making any business upgrades. Despite this current lull, the whole experience provided crucial lessons that would be beneficial to content specialists in any type of startup.

In hindsight, a few content solutions could have been used to streamline Emerging Pictures' exhibitor relations and marketing processes. With only two people managing 120 exhibitor accounts, it wasn't realistic for email and phone requests to be the company's main mode of 24/7 customer support. My main recommendation would be for the company to set up an extranet, or an online support centre only accessible to exhibitors. This portal would be a repository for all the marketing, programming, event playbook and social media tools that exhibitors require to manage EP screenings. A simple and accessible platform would be via Google sites. 20 Year Media would set up a private, secure site and share it only with approved exhibitor emails. This could help eliminate the constant back and forth of marketing and social media collateral requests.

To streamline their weekly newsletters and make them more compelling for exhibitors, 20 Year Media could have experimented with a video recap format

hosted by Vimeo or Youtube. A team member could run through the company's latest film and technology offerings and integrate trailers, interviews, reviews and demonstrations; this would be a fantastic way for exhibitors to obtain all the updates required, but it would be packaged in a modern, personal and easily digestible medium.

A large weak point for 20 Year Media was their social media efforts. I still believe in the value of assigning different uses for each platform; but to attract more followers and engagements you cannot rely on their entertaining content and organic reach alone to expand their audiences. Dollars need to be spent on social media advertising to increase exposure and the likelihood of more page follows and likes. Additionally, our team should have broadcasted more testimonials from satisfied WannaWatch.it users; I think we underestimated the power of word-of-mouth recommendations, but this can be a huge leg up for startups.

Conclusion

My experience at 20 Year Media taught me about the sink or swim nature of the tech world. The start up environment moves extremely quickly and I had to learn to work at the same pace in order to meet the company's goals. Looking back at my Marketing internship and role switch to Content Specialist, it's shocking to see how that all transpired over approximately 11 months. Within this time, 20 Year Media had gone from being a small tech innovation lab comprised of less than 10 employees to acquiring an entire film distribution network and becoming a support centre for over 100 independent theatres. While our team was prepared for this rapid acceleration, unfortunately, the theatres we worked with weren't fully convinced or aware of the value of 20 Year Media's supporting technologies. This unfortunately led to company's current static state.

Regardless of the outcome, the 20 Year Media office was a very inspiring environment to work in; our team would start each day with a 15-minute huddle. We would give our teammates a rundown of what we wanted to accomplish over the next 24 hours and described how this brought us closer to our goal of confronting the film industry's excess capacity problem. The next day, our task and approaches could be completely different depending on the shifts of technology, introduction of new film content and changes in user trends. The huddles mirrored the way we operated as a business; 20 Year Media directly responded to user and environmental research and social data intelligence. Our team believed that we could inject our progressive methodology and efficient, responsive technologies into the film distribution world to revive falling ticket sales.

It was a huge, demanding mission and it inspired me to be a pragmatic and fearless content specialist. Since this was my first foray in owning a content plan, I took it as a unique opportunity to experiment with and optimize both traditional promotional templates and modern social media tools. I learned how to wield different social media channels for specific purposes i.e. Twitter for customer support, Tumblr for editorial voice creation, Instagram for curating content. For public relations duties, I aimed to amp up press releases with clean, straightforward design and pair them with personal correspondence to build strong relationships with media outlets.

With our newsletters, I saw the huge jump in film bookings when we transferred to MailChimp's streamlined interface and started using segmented emails. In terms of composing marketing strategies with Emerging Pictures exhibitors, I learned to balance industry knowledge (gathered from respected resources like Indiewire) with the insights and opinions of theatre managers who live and breathe independent film.

Throughout my term at 20 Year Media, it was imperative as a Content Specialist to set strong checkpoints for myself and be as efficient and economical as possible with my content output. Every month, I would stop and assess my strategy and decide whether or not I had the right audience and intentions in mind. This was informed by audience research, social data intelligence and technological advances; aspects that formed the backbone of 20 Year Media's business. Being constantly aware of my surroundings and being empathetic to client and audience needs steered the direction of my promotional content strategy. I quickly learned that the best trait that a content strategist could possess is flexibility.

Bibliography

20 Year Media. November 23, 2013. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://20yearmedia.com/.

"2014 Theatrical Market Statistics." MPAA. March 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/MPAA-Theatrical-
     Market-Statistics-2014.pdf.

Burgmann, Tamsyn. "Silicon Valley North: Vancouver tech surges as U.S.
     immigration reform idles." CBC. August 10, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/silicon-valley-north-
     vancouver-tech-surges-as-u-s-immigration-reform-idles-1.2732667.

Da Silva, Michelle. "Curate the Rio lets audiences decide what to watch." Georgia
     Straight. May 16, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://www.straight.com/movies/646556/curate-rio-lets-audiences-decide-
     what-watch.

Dashputre, Aditi Dubey, Elise Waxenberg, and Michael Zaborskiy. "20 Year Media &
     Emerging Pictures: Who is the Best Customer? ." *Harvard Business School*,
     December 11, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.

Ebert, Roger. "I'll Tell You Why Movie Revenue is Dropping." RogerEbert.com.
     December 28, 2011. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/ill-tell-you-why-movie-
     revenue-is-dropping.

Fritz, Ben. "Movie tickets: Charge more for hits, less for flops, analyst urges." LA
     Times. April 13, 2012. Accessed October 10, 2016.
     http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/entertainmentnewsbuzz/2012/04/analyst-
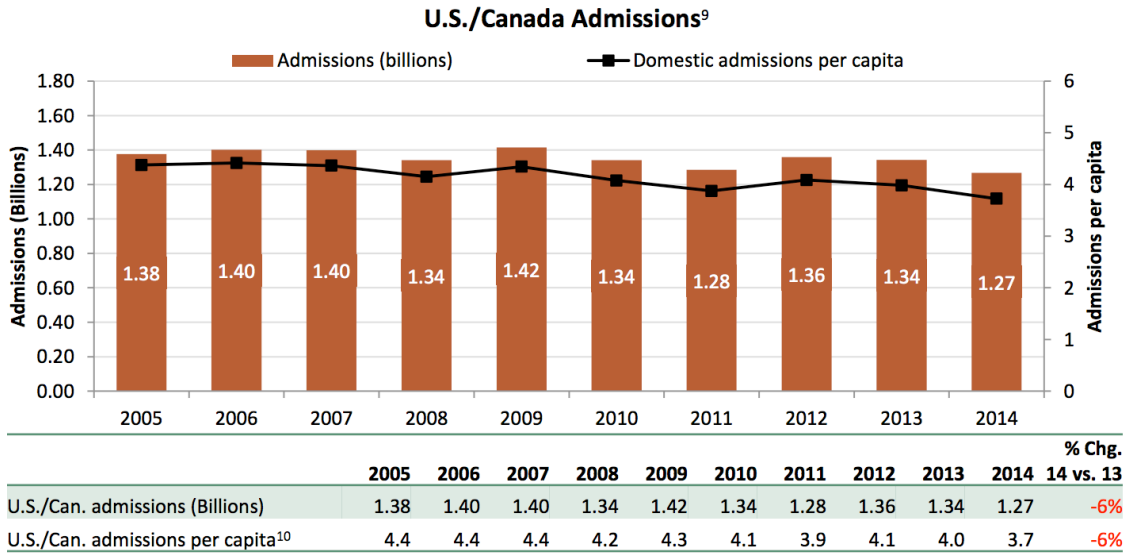   time-for-variable-movie-ticket-pricing.html .

Hemmadi, Murad. "Vancouver's booming Gastown tech startup scene, mapped."
    Canadian Business. May 11, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://www.canadianbusiness.com/innovation/vancouver-gastown-the-
    next-tech-boom/.

Hong, Julie. "What's Next for Social Data Intelligence." Convince and Convert.
    February 2016. Accessed October 10, 2015.
    http://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-business/social-data-
    intelligence/.

Lieberman, David. "CinemaCon: No Reality Check For Exhibitors." Deadline. April 29,
    2012. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://deadline.com/2012/04/cinemacon-post-mortem-when-will-theater-
    owners-get-real-about-their-problems-and-opportunities-263483/.

Mathews, Jack. "1939 : It was the greatest year in Hollywood history." LA Times.
    January 01, 1989. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://articles.latimes.com/1989-01-01/entertainment/ca-223_1_greatest-
    year.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge,
    Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994.

Narvey, Jonathon. "20 Year Media's Acquisition Strategy Has Lessons for Other
    Startups." Betakit. February 23, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://betakit.com/20-year-medias-acquisition-strategy-has-lessons-for-
    other-startups/.

Patel, Neil. "What are the Best Times to Post on Social Media?" Quicksprout. January
    2, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    https://www.quicksprout.com/2015/01/02/what-are-the-best-times-to-
    post-on-social-media/.

Ratzkin, Rebecca, and Alan Brown. "Making Sense of Audience Engagement." Gala
    Choruses. 2011. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://galachoruses.org/sites/default/files/Barun-
    Making_Sense_of_Audience_Engagement.pdf.

Schager, Nick. "6 Ways the Movie Distribution Model Is Changing." Vulture.
    December 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016.
    http://www.vulture.com/2014/12/6-ways-the-movie-distribution-model-
    is-changing.html.

St. Denis, Jen. "Life Lessons: Ryan Nadel, 20 Year Media." Business in Vancouver. January 28, 2016. Accessed October 10, 2015. https://www.biv.com/article/2016/1/life-lessons-ryan-nadel-20-year-media/.

"The rise of the sharing economy." The Economist. March 09, 2013. Accessed October 10, 2015. http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21573104-internet-everything-hire-rise-sharing-economy.

"The Sharing Economy: A New Way of Doing Business." Knowledge@Wharton. December 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016. http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/the-sharing-economy-a-new-way-of-doing-business/.

Thompson, Anne. " 20 Year Media Acquires Emerging Pictures ." Indiewire. January 20, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016. http://www.indiewire.com/2015/01/20-year-media-acquires-emerging-pictures-exclusive-189212/.

Von Sychowski, Patrick. "Why Digital Alone Won't Kill Second Run Movie Theatres." Celluloid Junkie. March 3, 2014. Accessed October 10, 2016. https://celluloidjunkie.com/2014/03/03/digital-alone-wont-kill-second-run-movie-theatres/.

Waddell, Nick. "With Twenty Year Media Acquisition, Mobio Looks to Change the Script." June 16, 2015. Accessed February 19, 2017. http://www.cantechletter.com/2015/06/with-twenty-year-media-acquisition-mobio-looks-to-change-the-script/.

Winfrey, Graham. "Why the Movie Business Is Long Overdue for Disruption." Inc. Magazine. October 26, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016. http://www.inc.com/graham-winfrey/4-startups-hell-bent-on-saving-hollywood-from-itself.htmlhttp://www.inc.com/graham-winfrey/4-startups-hell-bent-on-saving-hollywood-from-itself.html.

Appendix A

U.S./Canada Box Office Numbers in 2014

"In 2014, U.S./Canada box office was $10.4 billion, down 5% from $10.9 billion in 2013.7 3D box office ($1.4 billion) comprised 14% of total box office, two percentage points less than the previous year. Admissions, or tickets sold (1.27 billion), and average tickets sold per person (3.7) both declined 6% in 2014" (MPAA 2015).

U.S./Canada Admissions[9]

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	% Chg. 14 vs. 13
U.S./Can. admissions (Billions)	1.38	1.40	1.40	1.34	1.42	1.34	1.28	1.36	1.34	1.27	-6%
U.S./Can. admissions per capita[10]	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.9	4.1	4.0	3.7	-6%

Appendix B

WannaWatch.it Tumblr Entry Copy

CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH THROUGH FILM

Women's History Month honors the generations of women who have led political, social and environmental progress on a global scale. Alongside various events organized by the Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian this March, we've come up with a list of moving and inspirational films that celebrate these heroes.

Finding Vivian Maier

Vivian Maier's photos were seemingly destined for obscurity, lost among the clutter of the countless objects she'd collected throughout her life. Instead these images have shaken the world of street photography and irrevocably changed the life of the man who brought them to the public eye. This film brings to life the interesting turns and travails of the improbable saga of John Maloof's discovery of Vivian Maier, unravelling this mysterious tale through her documentary films, photographs, odd collections and personal accounts from the people that knew her.

Still Alice

Alice Howland, happily married with three grown children, is a renowned linguistics professor who starts to forget words. When she receives a devastating diagnosis, Alice and her family find their bonds tested.

Persepolis

With amazing wit and heart, this award-winning animated feature tells the poignant story of a young girl coming-of-age in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. Through the eyes of precocious and outspoken 9-year-old Marjane, we see a people's hopes dashed as fundamentalists take power—forcing the veil on women and imprisoning thousands. Clever and fearless, she outsmarts the "social guardians" and discovers punk, ABBA and Iron Maiden. Feeling vulnerable and alone in a strange land after being sent to school in Austria, she has to combat being equated with the religious fundamentalism and extremism she fled her country to escape.

Chely Wright: Wish me Away

Chely Wright: Wish Me Away is the story of Chely Wright, the first country music star to come out as gay. Over three years, the filmmakers were given extraordinary access to Chely's struggle and her unfolding plan to come out publicly. Chronicling the aftermath in her hometown of Nashville and within the larger LGBT community, Wish Me Away reveals both the devastation of her own internalized homophobia and the transformational power of living an authentic life.

Two Days, One Night

Sandra is a young woman who has only one weekend to convince her colleagues they must give up their bonuses in order for her to keep her job — not an easy task in this economy.

Appendix C

Curate the Rio Press Release

May 8, 2014
For immediate release
20 YEAR MEDIA

CURATE THE RIO!

The Rio Theatre and 20 Year Media launch their People's Choice film series
beginning with a tribute to Philip Seymour Hoffman on **May 26th, 2014**.

Pick the Flicks: Online Film Community Calls the Shots at the Rio's Upcoming Film Event

This May, Vancouver's beloved **Rio Theatre** will give fans the opportunity to choose what plays on their favourite local screen for one evening a month, extending into the summer season. The power of programming will be placed in the audience's hands through the new **WannaWatch.it** movie tracking and social website. Developed by **20 Year Media** in Vancouver, the web application enables users to browse through current theatre, Netflix and iTunes listings and organize movie nights with friends and family. The Rio is utilizing the voting feature of the site that allows locals to dictate what they project on their screen for this community-driven series.

"One of the biggest challenges any indie movie theatre faces is programming based on what people actually want to see on the big screen. Being able to have fans of the Rio involved in the decision-making process is the best approach to programming because it's a win-win for everyone."

-Rachel Fox, programmer at Rio Theatre

Over the next two weeks, Vancouver's cinephile community can mull over their favourite Philip Seymour Hoffman film and place their votes on the Rio's WannaWatch.it page. The movie with the most votes will be revealed closer to the event and the Rio will screen the people's choice on **May 26th at 7pm**. The first hundred voters will gain free entry on May 26, and all remaining attendees will be entered in a draw for movie tickets to future WannaWatchIt nights at the Rio. The intriguing element of the Rio's collaboration with 20 Year Media is seeing where the series will lead as a growing community on WannaWatch.it becomes more social and active on the site.

"We're really excited to be working with the Rio theatre to create new ways for the community to be a part of their local arts and culture scene. A movie theatre is about more than the latest hollywood blockbuster - it's about community and making movies social again. The Rio has always shared these values and we hope to encourage and enrich this experience through our technology platform at WannaWatch.it."

-Ryan Nadel, co-founder of 20 Year Media

Programming By Demand: Bridging the Gap Between Exhibitors and Audiences

The Rio is excited to be a part of this unique, experimental project and anticipates an enthusiastic response from their supportive and vocal following. The people's choice series will invite moviegoers to weigh in on other crowd-chosen cult classics over the summer. 20 Year Media is eager to see how independent movie theatres like the Rio can innovate their business and empower the audience through WannaWatch.it's socially-driven technology.

20 Year Media's overarching goal is to encourage the responsive relationship between exhibitors and moviegoers and revive the thrill around movie nights that has been suffocated by Hollywood blockbuster culture. They have envisioned a streamlined, accessible platform that assists independent cinemas throughout North America with the heavy, and often unpredictable, task of mapping their film schedules. By giving film-lovers and exhibitors a simple and engaging forum to archive and organize their tastes and preferences, they hope to create a more seamless and community-centred movie distribution system for all parties involved.

Event Links:
WannaWatch.it Event and Voting Page: http://www.wannawatch.it/screenings/1
The Rio Theatre: riotheatre.ca
20 Year Media: 20yearmedia.com

About the Rio
Built in 1938, the independently owned and operated Rio Theatre is East Vancouver's premier multimedia venue, specializing in both cinema and live entertainment. Locals flock to the restored art-deco theatre for its diverse programming mix, which regularly features everything from late night cult classics, day-long movie and TV marathons, first-run Hollywood blockbusters and indie darlings to sci-fi themed burlesque or live comedy nights. A fully licensed bar, friendly staff and state-of-the-art digital projection with surround sound makes the Rio one of Vancouver's most treasured hubs for film and community events.

About 20 Year Media
Based in Vancouver, 20 Year Media builds technology and web applications that connect moviegoers and exhibitors through social data and a collaborative consumption platform. The company helps movie theatres capitalize on excess inventory by aggregating consumer demand for film content and directing audiences to the most appropriate and convenient screen – beginning with their favourite theatres. 20 Year's web application WannaWatch.it allows users to track over 12,000 movies across North American theatres, Netflix and iTunes databases. Film lovers can then connect with each other over similar preferences and easily organize their own movie nights.

We welcome you to join us for the launch of this collaborative series. Media passes and interviews with the organizers are available upon request.

For more information contact:
Ria Nevada | Community Development | 20 Year Media | riaonevada@gmail.com

Appendix D

Targeted Emerging Pictures newsletter

Few comedies can boast the cult status of MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL. Decades after its release, fans still fawn over the slapstick and genius humour brought to the screen by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. This year marks the film's 40th anniversary and we invite you to bring the remastered version with additional footage to your theatres!

Contact Lee for bookings at your earliest convenience.

MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL

Directed by Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones

Starring Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Eric Idle

UK - PG - 91 minutes

Official website

The classic film that inspired to current Broadway hit Spamalot returns to the big screen- for the first time EVER in high-definition! "Could this be the funniest movie ever made? By any rational measure of comedy, this medieval romp from the Monty Python troupe certainly belongs on the short list of candidates. The sum of this madness is a movie that's beloved by anyone with a pulse and an irreverent sense of humor. If this movie doesn't make you laugh, you're almost certainly dead." –Jeff Shannon

"Nobody ever placed brilliance in the service of silliness quite the way the Python gang did. Monty Python and the Holy Grail is stuffed with both." - Jay Carr, *Boston Globe*

"It's still the Holy Grail of crazy comedy." - Michael Sragow, *Baltimore Sun*

"Still stands as a gloriously silly and twisted send-up." - Steven Rea, *Philadelphia Inquirer*