

# STEPIN 2017

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## FINAL REPORT

On Thursday August 3<sup>rd</sup>, a group of 50 prominent European independent film industry execs, chosen among various profiles for their experience, assembled for the Locarno Festival's fifth edition of StepIn to discuss the timely topic of "The Theatrical Experience and the Future of Auteur Cinema in the Age of Global Streaming Platforms and Social Networks." Following the recent controversy in Cannes over Netflix's stringent theatrical release policy, Locarno's StepIn think tank provided a forum to take the discussion to a more constructive level. It also offered a glimpse into future developments of a complex, constantly evolving scenario.

The event took place from 11.30 AM to 6 PM and was divided in 3 parts:

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### PART I - OPENING KEYNOTE

*Open to all Press, Professional and Industry accredited*

"Every once in a while there is someone who mourns the end of the theatrical experience," said StepIn project manager Marcello Paolillo, in his introduction. "But while researching for this event I realised that, even though we are going through a challenging period, with seismic changes in the industry, the question is not if the theatrical experience will survive, but how it will evolve."

During the opening keynote Tim League, who is CEO of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema chain in the U.S. which operates some of the best movie theatres in the world, offered his perspective that, at least in the United States, the erosion of theatrical "is probably good in the long run" because it is forcing exhibition chains to re-invest to upgrade movie theatres so they can offer a top notch moviegoing experience.

Focus Features President Robert Walak, another keynote speaker, noted that one of the first films they greenlit under the new Focus, Sofia Coppola's "The Beguiled," was specifically conceived for theatrical in "The way it was shot; the way it was set up, it was just a cinematic experience. And that is our strength in terms of what we do at Focus."

Bobby Allen, VP of Content at MUBI, the curated streaming platform available in more than 200 territories, which last year branched into theatrical distribution, also underlined that auteur cinema is "made to be seen on the big screen." "The most important thing to us is to ensure these films have a life beyond the digital platform," he noted.

## Keynote Speakers:

### BOBBY ALLEN

Mubi | VP of Content



Bobby Allen has over twenty years of experience in the global film and entertainment business. Currently he is the VP of Content at MUBI, one of the fastest growing independent VOD platforms in the world, where he is responsible for all programming, content and editorial. He is also leading MUBI's move into theatrical distribution and co-production. Before joining MUBI he was an independent film producer and the VP of Sales & Acquisition at Celluloid Dreams. Before that he was Head of Production at MTV Films Europe, Head Of Acquisitions at Film Four and he has held senior executive positions in international film sales and acquisitions at companies such as PolyGram Film International, Lionsgate, and Mayfair Entertainment.

### TIM LEAGUE

Alamo Drafthouse Cinema | Founder & CEO



Tim League graduated from Rice University in 1992 with degrees in Mechanical Engineering and Art/Art History. After a two-year stint at Shell Oil in Bakersfield, California, Tim left the engineering profession and opened up his first movie theater, the Tejon Theater. When that theater closed after a short run in 1995, he and his wife Karrie loaded a truck with 200 seats, a projector, screen, and speakers and headed to Austin. They founded Alamo Drafthouse in 1997, where as CEO League remains committed to providing creative programming and a zero tolerance policy for disruption during the theater experience. League also co-founded Fantastic Fest, the largest genre film festival in the United States, and NEON, the newest powerhouse in US Film Distribution with titles such as *Colossal* and *The Bad Batch*.

### ROBERT WALAK

Focus Features | President



Robert Walak is President of Focus Features, one of the most important distribution and production company of specialty films worldwide, premier label of iconic movies from fearless filmmakers. Based in London, Mr. Walak was previously Co-Managing Director of Universal Pictures International Productions, and before, Managing Director Europe/President Production, Acquisitions and Television at The Weinstein Company, where he acquired titles such as Todd Haynes' *Carol*, Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*, Paul King's *Paddington*, Morten Tyldum's *The Imitation Game*, and Garth Davis' *Lion*. Mr. Walak was also executive producer on Tom Harper's epic miniseries *War and Peace*. He was previously Senior Vice President, Acquisitions & Production at Alliance Films/Momentum Pictures, shepherding projects such as *The King's Speech*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, the *Twilight* franchise, and Steve McQueen's *Shame*, which he exec-produced. Earlier in his career, he worked in business development at Endemol and was a producer at MTV Europe. Walak holds a Masters in Film & Television from the University of Amsterdam.

**Keynote Moderator:**

**Nick Vivarelli**

**Variety | Italy and Middle East correspondent**

Born in Florence to an American mother and an Italian father, Nick Vivarelli has spent plenty of time in both countries. After studying comparative literature at New York University, he dabbled as a literary translator and art gallery organizer before venturing into journalism and film. Since then, he has worked for several media outlets, including The Associated Press and Newsweek. A regular on the international festival circuit, he is currently Italy and Middle East correspondent for Variety. He is also the author of "Slalom," a Tuscany-set thriller published by Manni Editori in Italy.

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**PART II - ROUND-TABLE SESSION**

*StepIn Guests Only*

After the keynote, participants were divided in 5 round tables for a 2-hour session on specific topics. Each table had a Moderator and a Notetaker:

**TABLE 1: How Global Platforms are impacting Film Production**

Moderator: Robert Walak (Focus Features)

Notetaker: Jaime Romandia (Mantarraya Producciones)

**TABLE 2: Global Platforms and the Theatrical Experience**

Moderator: Bobby Allen (Mubi)

Notetaker: Susan Wendt (TrustNordisk)

**TABLE 3: New Strategies of Distribution and Exhibition**

Moderator: Tim League (Alamo Drafthouse)

Notetaker: Marc Allenby (Trafalgar Releasing)

**TABLE 4: Marketing Movies in the Age of Social Networks**

Moderator: Mathias Noschis (Alphapanda)

Notetaker: Jon Barrenechea (Picturehouse)

**TABLE 5: The Role of Film Festivals**

Moderator: Jenn Murphy (AFI Fest)

Notetaker: Allison Gardner (Glasgow Film Theatre)

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**PART III – WRAP-UP SESSION**

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During this conclusive session, moderated by Variety correspondent Nick Vivarelli, all 50 participants gathered together once again, as the five notetakers from the previous session presented a brief summary of what's been discussed, and offered conclusions and comments for further discussion.

**TABLE 1: How Global Platforms are impacting film Production**

Notetaker: Jaime Romandia (CEO & Founder, Mantarraya Producciones)

- ✓ The immediate danger of global streaming platforms is not clear, since they are still in flux.
- ✓ These new streaming platforms force us, the movie industry, to better focus on theatrical distribution and make the exhibition experience more attractive.
- ✓ These new players work with producers in different ways. Some of them get involved and interfere in the content of the films, and others are not transparent. Netflix, for example, usually is not providing any data, and this is disrupting the way we value films and filmmakers.
- ✓ These platforms should not use their market power to restrict public access to the movies, for example by removing a film from festival distribution, because this is a cultural loss for the public and also for the filmmaker.
- ✓ This new global digital world is still not regulated as needed, for example as it happened with TV players in the past, but hopefully regulations would come soon to guarantee more transparency for the movie industry and more responsibility for the new players.

**TABLE 2: Global Platforms and the Theatrical Experience**

Notetaker: Susan Wendt (Director Of International Sales & Marketing, TrustNordisk)

- ✓ Digitilization is pushing the Theatrical to be even smarter, more event driven.
- ✓ Platforms: In the future it will be not just giants like Amazon and Netflix, but smaller and more targeted, specialized platforms. More of these are needed.
- ✓ Data networking is key. Data sharing among indies is important to minimize risk.
- ✓ Investments are still needed to improve the art-house circuit.
- ✓ Specialized platforms give access to better films and inspire audiences to go see art movies in movie theatres.
- ✓ The theatrical experience is important, but is also more expensive. Also the target audience is older. The key question is: will young people see movies in theatres when they are older? What can be done to ensure this?

**TABLE 3: New Strategies of Distribution and Exhibition**

Notetaker: Marc Allenby (CEO, Trafalgar Releasing)

The table focused both on distribution and exhibition issues.

## Distribution:

- ✓ Distributors are generally doing a good job, but need to evolve to maintain a sustainable business model.
- ✓ Event theatrical releases are a good strategy. Examples are “Secret Cinema” launches in UK.
- ✓ Also in UK Trafalgar Releasing is disrupting the traditional distribution model with global direct distribution, which works for films and events with clearly identifiable target audiences.

## Exhibition:

- ✓ Some theatrical exhibitors have become lazy. They have overlooked their biggest asset: their relationship with customers.
- ✓ There are innovative high-quality cinema chains, like Numax in Spain.
- ✓ Can we work closer with Netflix?

## **TABLE 4: Marketing Movies in the Age of Social Networks**

Notetaker: Jon Barrenechea (Deputy Director of Marketing, Picturehouse)

- ✓ Social media marketing is important, vital and growing, but its value is not being maximised and data is not understood and not being utilised efficiently.
- ✓ Social media marketing has different roles for different things: film campaigns, B2Bs, exhibitors, distributors.
- ✓ The challenges are that producers/content providers do not create marketing assets during production - perhaps funders should require marketing materials as part of their funding.
- ✓ Some films lend themselves more easily to marketing campaigns (The Lobster).
- ✓ There are some key data points (Gruvi) that can determine the success of a film and allow us to modify the result based on it - A24 in America are really good at this.
- ✓ A question that came up was about older audiences - how do we engage with them if they're not digitally savvy. Actually older audiences are engaged on Facebook and email.
- ✓ Social media engagement doesn't always translate into ticket sales - especially when there's a celebrity element attached to it.
- ✓ How do we build trust and a brand that people want to be involved with? Criterion and A24, are brands that people trust regardless of the films - they are creating assets that are not related to the campaigns - Picturehouse builds communities, not campaigns.

- ✓ Some territories are more susceptible to social media - Italy apparently is not one of them.
- ✓ We need to create experiences for customers, online and offline. This will drive engagement.
- ✓ Sometimes a vision, and trusting your gut, is more important than data - but combining both is the key.
- ✓ Brands that have typically been B2B are starting to act more like B2C - and should. Bringing social assets to Cannes will allow films to capitalise on the PR to build a brand before you even sell the movie.
- ✓ Social media marketing is as much marketing as traditional publicity and advertising, and takes as much time and energy – companies should not discount it.
- ✓ Ultimately, in this new landscape, nobody knows anything.

**TABLE 5: The Role of Film Festivals**

Notetaker: Allison Gardner (Programme Director and Festival Co-Director, Glasgow Film Theatre)

- ✓ Festivals are having mixed experiences with Netflix.
- ✓ Sales companies don't want A-list festivals to show Netflix movies in competition, since they don't need the promotion, but festivals programmers think that they should choose a film based on its artistic merits.
- ✓ Are there too many festivals? Is there too much content? Are we - festival programmers - too obsessed with world premieres?
- ✓ Our job is to help up-and-coming filmmakers and to nurture their future careers. Discovery is one of our most important job. We are the R&D [Research & Development] and testing ground of films for audiences.
- ✓ Should film festivals have their own on-line platforms? Or is it better to work with existing on-line platforms? There are already so many: do we need more?

## STEPIN 2017 PARTICIPANTS

**TABLE 1: How Global Platforms are impacting Film Production**

Matthias Bürcher	Federal Office of Culture Chief Analyst - International Co-productions	Switzerland	
Woo Jung Cho	Cinereach Director Business Affairs	USA	
Mike Goodridge	Protagonist Pictures CEO	UK	
Michel Merkt	KNM, Producer	Monaco	
Jaime Romandia	Mantarraya Producciones CEO & Founder	Mexico	Notetaker
Roberto Olla	Eurimages Executive Director	France	
Katriel Schory	Israel film Fund Executive Director	Israel	
Kamiel Van Der Ster	De Filmfreak Managing Director	Netherlands	
Robert Walak	Focus Features President	UK	Moderator

**TABLE 2: Global Platforms and the Theatrical Experience**

Bobby Allen	MUBI Vice President - Content	UK	Moderator
Lorenzo Fiuzzi	Filmatique President & Founder	USA	
Edward Fletcher	Thunderbird Releasing Managing Director	UK	
Alaa Karkouti	MAD Solutions Co-founder & Managing Partner	Egypt	
Mark Lindsay	Saboteur Media President of Distribution	USA	
Davide Novelli	Vision Distribution Distribution Director	Italy	
Bianca Obermaier	Weltkino Acquisition	Germany	
Ales Stuchly	Film Europe Media Company Program & Acquisition Manager	Czech Republic	
Susan Wendt	TrustNordisk Director Intl. Sales & Marketing	Denmark	Notetaker
Andy Whittaker	DogWoof Founder	UK	



**TABLE 3: New Strategies of Distribution and Exhibition**

Marc Allenby	Trafalgar Releasing CEO	UK	Notetaker
Edward Arentz	Greenwich Entertainment Managing Director	USA	
Carole Baraton	Charades Co-Founder	France	
Margherita Chiti	Teodora Film Head of Acquisitions & Sales	Italy	
Philipp Hoffmann	Rushlake Media GmbH Founder & Managing Director	Germany	
Tim League	Alamo Drafthouse Founder & CEO	USA	Moderator
Ramiro Ledo	Numax Head of Acquisitions	Spain	
Barry Rebo	Eclair USA Managing Partner	USA	
Fabien Riggall	Secret Cinema Founder	UK	
Matthias Stütz	Union Filmtheater Exhibitor	Germany	

**TABLE 4: Marketing Movies in the Age of Social Networks**

Jon Barrenechea	Picturehouse Deputy Director of Marketing	UK	Notetaker
Rodrigo Brandao	Kino Lorber VP of Marketing and Publicity	USA	
Andrea Cirila	Fil Rouge Media General Manager	Italy	
Ben Johnson	Gruvi Ltd. CEO	UK	
Marcel Mueller	Swiss Films Film Consultant, VOD & Programmes	Switzerland	
Mathias Noschis	Alphapanda Film Marketing Strategist	UK	Moderator
Robin Plamondon	Cinéma Le Clap CEO	Canada	
Lorenzo Ricciarelli	Studiocanal Senior Project Manager Intl. Distribution & Marketing	France	
Ryan Werner	Cinetic Media Senior Executive	USA	
Pawel Wieszczeinski	Kinoscope Founder & Executive Director	USA	

**TABLE 5: The Role of Film Festivals**

Emmanuel Cuénod	Geneva International Film Festival General and Artistic Director	Switzerland	
Daniela Elstner	Doc & Film International Managing Director	France	
Robert Enmark	SF Studios Head of Acquisitions	Sweden	
Giovanna Fulvi	Filmauro SRL Head of Acquisitions	Italy	
Roger Garcia	Hong Kong International Film Festival Society Executive Director	Hong Kong	
Allison Gardner	Glasgow Film Theater Programme Director & Festival Co-Director	UK	Notetaker
Nicholas Kaiser	Memento Films International COO	France	
Jenn Murphy	AFI FEST Senior programmer	USA	Moderator
Andrea Romeo	I Wonder Pictures General Manager	Italy	
Gilles Sousa	BAC Films Head of Sales	France	