



Australian Government

SCREEN  
AUSTRALIA

## **MIPCOM 2009 Cannes, 5–8 October 2009**

### **Report by Tim Phillips, Investment Manager, Drama**

Tim Phillips and Ross Matthews attended MIPCOM 2009 in Cannes, France from 5 to 8 October 2009.

#### **The market**

This year was the 25th anniversary of MIPCOM. The organisers were no doubt glad that the milestone was not overwhelmed by ongoing concerns about the global economy. Six months earlier at MIPTV buyers, distributors and co-producers were cautious about the potential impact of the economic crisis on their businesses. At MIPCOM most participants seemed to be looking forward.

Official reports had around 11,600 delegates attending the market, of which 4,000 were content buyers. This figure was up 13% on MIPTV 2009. However, figures were down on MIPCOM 2008's record breaking 13,000 delegates.

Like MIPTV earlier in the year, the weak economy did not deter the significant organizations from attending. Reed MIDEM representative Laurine Gauraud was quoted as saying, "The numbers are slightly down, but the context is completely different... What's important for our clients is the quality of the people they're meeting, and all of the major players were here."

With lower levels of international production over the past year, sellers were doing most of their business from their catalogues. However, there was significant interest from UK distributors in a number of new Australian television drama programs, predominantly. The current low production levels in the UK meant that distributors seeking to build their catalogues were looking closely at programs currently being developed in Australia.

## Australian presence

As usual, there was a strong Australian presence at the market. Australian production companies/producers attending included:

- 1440 Productions
- activeTV
- Ambience Entertainment
- Angela Walsh Productions
- Animazing Productions
- Australian Asian Pacific Services
- Beyond
- Blink Films
- Buon Giorno Productions
- Burberry Productions
- Buster Dandy Productions
- Classical Destinations
- Cubby House Pictures
- David Adams Films
- Essential Media and Entertainment
- Ettamogah Entertainment
- Exero HDTV
- The Fairies
- Festcom
- Great Western Entertainment
- Hackett Films
- Halo Pictures
- Heydon Films
- Jelly Jym
- The Late Knights
- Looking Glass International
- Mago Films
- Mango-a-gogo Productions
- Matchbox Pictures
- Media World Productions
- mememe productions
- MFP Media
- Monkeystack
- Mumbo Jumbo
- New Holland Pictures
- The Project Factory
- Screentime
- Short Attention
- SLR Productions
- Square i
- Sticky Pictures
- Studio Moshi
- Taylor Media
- Verve Entertainment
- Viskatoons
- The Wiggles
- World Wide Entertainment
- WTFN Entertainment

A number of Australian entities operated out of their own stands. Geelong based World Wide Entertainment had a strong stream of buyers moving through its impressively sized stand. The ACTF stand highlighted its new live action kids television titles for distribution, with staff reporting strong interest. Southern Star and Beyond had significant presence at their own stands. Other Australian producers and distributors operated out of the busy Screen Australia stand, where meeting areas could be booked for half hour periods.

## Meetings

Screen Australia representatives sought to meet with financing partners (ie. distributors, broadcasters and financiers) on programs in which the agency had invested, as well as prospective partners on projects which are likely to apply for finance.

They included the following:

**Edwina Thring, National Geographic Television International**

National Geographic Television International is the rights management and distribution business of National Geographic. It distributes a significant amount of Australian factual programming.

As a distributor, it is seeking “blue chip” wildlife programs, but Edwina noted that it currently has an abundance of underwater programs at present and was not seeking any more. [www.natgeotv-int.com](http://www.natgeotv-int.com)

**David Pounds, Electric Sky (UK)**

Electric Sky is a UK based distributor of factual programs and is on the lookout for new content. UK factual production levels have been low, so it is looking internationally, especially to Australian producers, which are regarded as delivering high quality product which work well. Science, history, wildlife, crime, lifestyle and travel all continue to sell and therefore remain of interest. However, Electric Sky prefers to receive proposals for series, not one-off programs.

The Electric Sky stand was drawing a lot of casual visitors to view its 3D television demonstration. They see 3D television as being a driver of factual content. [www.electricsky.com](http://www.electricsky.com)

**Masaharu Inaba, Sony Creative Products (Japan)**

Sony Creative Products, a division of Sony Corp, is seeking to generate and exploit its own intellectual property, primarily in the Japanese market.

It is interested in co-production opportunities with Australian producers to assist in the exploitation of these properties.

**Emily Elisha, RDF Media Group (UK)**

RDF Media Group produces and distributes factual, drama and children’s television content.

Several Australian television production companies, factual and drama, have had distribution support from RDF. They are interested in new content and are approachable. [www.rdfmedia.com](http://www.rdfmedia.com)

**Zecki Gerloff, TVF International (UK)**

TVF is an international distributor of factual content, including the Screen Australia funded *Ten Conditions of Love*. Its catalogue is a mix of series and ‘one-offs’. It does not have significant funds for advances, but will sometimes provide them when the project is deemed appropriate.

In terms of content, it is looking to acquire stories which have an international focus, are glossy and look at issues from a new angle. Wildlife is always in demand, as well as crime and history shows about specific characters.

TVF is interested in getting involved in productions at an early stage and, if it likes the project, will help the producer finance the project. It may take an Executive Producer credit for such a role. [www.tvfinternational.com](http://www.tvfinternational.com)

**Helen Jackson, BBC Worldwide (UK)**

The main commercial arm of the BBC. BBC Worldwide has been undergoing a program of buying stakes in independent production companies, both in the UK and abroad, to shore up its relationship with key content providers. Investments have been made in significant UK production companies Baby Cow, Left Bank Pictures and Bedder 6. BBCW also holds shares in Canadian company Temple Street and Australian company Freehand.

Nevertheless, Helen stressed that Worldwide is still keen to work with any independent production company, be it drama or factual, provided that they have ambitious ideas and are willing to work with a big creative partner.

[www.bbcworldwide.com](http://www.bbcworldwide.com)

**Jim Howell, Park Entertainment (UK)**

Park Entertainment is predominantly a distributor and sales agent for independently produced films and television programs. It also develops and co-produces programs, which it did on the Screen Australia funded children's series *K9*.

The Park stand was predominantly focused on promoting *K9*. Park also represents the Screen Australia supported feature film *The Combination*.

Park advised that it had a number of projects currently in development that it would probably soon seek co-production arrangements in Australia.

[www.parkentertainment.com](http://www.parkentertainment.com)

**Louise Pederson, All3Media (UK)**

All3Media is a distributor with a catalogue of comedy, drama and factual content. It also has ownership shares in a number of production companies around the world, and has contractual 'first look' deals with a number of those companies. It recently carried out a roadtrip to Australia and is currently distributing the Australian series *Bondi Rescue*.

In terms of acquisitions, it is looking for contemporary series and mini series, but has little interest in telemovies or one-off factual programs. Returning series are always in demand as these are easier to place than new series.

[www.all3media.com](http://www.all3media.com)

**Pilar Perez, DCD Rights (UK)**

At MIPTV, DCD Rights advised Screen Australia of its intention to acquire Australian content. Since then, the representatives of the company visited Australia, and it has committed to worldwide distribution for the Screen Australia funded telemovies *Sisters of War* and *The Caroline Byrne Story*.

DCD Rights has a rolling EIS (Enterprise and Investment Scheme) fund. For the investors to be able to take advantage of the Scheme, its funds must be spent within a three year period. Accordingly, DCD Rights has funds for acquisitions that must be expended.

It was interested in a number of Australian projects being pitched at MIPCOM.

Unlike most distributors, DCD Rights does not shy away from one-off telemovies. However, it will only get involved where the project had an obvious international audience. A telemovie such as *The Caroline Byrne Story*, which was firmly in a very marketable 'true crime' genre, was an example.

DCD Rights is willing to offer advances on properties. [www.dcdmedia.co.uk](http://www.dcdmedia.co.uk)

#### **Jeremy Fox, Digital Rights Group (UK)**

Digital Rights Group is an umbrella organisation for a number of media companies including Portman Film and Television and C4i. DRG provides producers with international distribution for their programmes, independently of the major broadcasters or other producer-owned distributors. CEO Jeremy Fox noted that the current crisis in production in the United Kingdom is something that Australian producers take as normal. UK producers are now having to deal with much greater deficits as broadcasters contribute a lower proportion of the production budget. While Australian producers have dealt with these large deficits for years, these are relatively new challenges to UK producers.

DRG was happy to advise that it had just finished negotiating a sale of all three series of *Underbelly* to a major US satellite network, DirecTV, which has over 50 million subscribers. DRG also distributes *Sea Patrol*.

[www.digitalrightsgroup.co.uk](http://www.digitalrightsgroup.co.uk)

#### **Ali Hill, Target Entertainment (UK)**

Target is a production and distribution business with offices in London, New York and LA. It distributes Australian programs including *East West 101* and *The Cut*.

Given the slow down on production in the UK, Target's recent focus had been of sales from its existing catalogue. Drama commissioning, in particular, had been very slow.

Sales of factual entertainment and general light entertainment programming had been better than they expected during the economic downturn.

[www.targetentertainmentgroup.com](http://www.targetentertainmentgroup.com)

#### **Clark Bunting, Discovery Channel (US)**

Discovery Channel is one of the major worldwide players for factual content. It is a co-financier with Screen Australia on the 3D feature documentary *Cane Toads*.

Discovery continued to perform very strongly in the US during the economic slowdown, perhaps giving support to the theory that Americans were riding out the recession from their lounge room.

#### **Rick Allen, Snag Films**

Snag Films is an online aggregator of documentary films. Users can watch films from the Snag website with no software installation or downloading required. Using a widget, users can place films from the Snag website on their own webpage, blog, Facebook or MySpace page. The concept is that

this greatly enhances the potential audience for films by creating thousands of 'virtual movie theatres' for documentary films.

Snag features films from established producers as well as first time filmmakers. Snag Films pays rights holders an equal share of advertising earned from streaming their films on the Snag Films website, on a virtual movie theatre widget or through a Snag Films distribution partner. Additional revenue can be earned from links to buy the DVD or pay to download.

[www.snagfilms.com](http://www.snagfilms.com)

#### **Ellen Windermuth, Off The Fence (Netherlands)**

Off The Fence is an international distributor of documentary and other factual genres based in the Netherlands.

They have around 20-30 hours of Australian content in their catalogue and would acquire more but for the fact that Australian producers are often looking for advances which are, in their opinion, too high.

They are on the look out for new content, especially in the science, natural history and environment areas. Ellen is surprised there is not more natural history programming coming out of Australia given its natural beauty. Off The Fence wants to work with Australian factual producers who are willing to collaborate with their distribution partner, and are producing projects which are globally relevant. [www.offthefence.com](http://www.offthefence.com)

#### **Genevieve Dexter, Cake Entertainment (UK)**

Cake Entertainment is a leading children's television distributor.

This was primarily a follow up meeting from MIPTV. Cake Entertainment is distributing the Screen Australia financed children's series *Dead Gorgeous*.

Cake was also interested in other Australian animated series still in development. [www.cakeentertainment.com](http://www.cakeentertainment.com)

#### **Noel Hedges, ITV Studios Global Entertainment (UK)**

ITV Studios is a European distributor across all genres including drama, factual, light entertainment and children's. The company is based in the UK, and connected to broadcaster ITV financially and contractually – ITV gets a first look at everything the distributor acquires. It handles the rights to a number of Australian series, including the AFC funded series, *Bogan Pride*.

Again, due to the production slowdown in the UK it is currently looking for new content, in particular new drama series. It is not particularly interested in one off telemovies, as in its view such projects don't bring the same returns but require the same amount of work to promote and sell. It was very interested in a number of Australian drama series that were being pitched at the market, and expected to make an offer on at least one of them. At the time of our meeting, ITV Studios were very positive about the sales being made in the market [www.globalent.itv.com](http://www.globalent.itv.com)

#### **Pierre-Andre Rochat and Anne-Marie Gaskin, Daro Film Distribution (Monaco)**

Daro is a distributor of film and television, including recent Screen Australia funded children's programs *Dogstar*, *Pixel Pinkie* and *Stormworld*. Daro said that they were meeting with a lot of Australian producers at the market to consider acquisitions. In respect of the programs around the market, they noted that there was an enormous amount of animation being pitched.

They advised that any series not being delivered in HD were being extremely difficult to sell. They recommended that HD be a requirement for Screen Australia funded television content in the future.

Sales had definitely been down, but they advised that the year should end with reasonable numbers. They reported that kids content and commercial drama were doing better in terms of sales than heavy dramas. [www.daro-films.mc](http://www.daro-films.mc)

#### **Justin Bodle, Power (UK)**

Power is a European producer and distributor of series, mini-series and telemovies, including some big budget productions. It has worked with Australian producers on mini series including *Answered By Fire*.

Power is mainly interested in co-productions, including in Australia. [www.powcorp.com](http://www.powcorp.com)

#### **Fortissimo, Michael Werner (Netherlands)**

Fortissimo is a leading distributor of art-house feature films, including feature documentaries. They are continually looking for new content and have historically been strong supporters of Australian content, including recently acquiring the rights to the Screen Australia funded low budget feature *Griff*, *The Invisible*. He said that despite the economic downturn, business remained stable. <http://www.fortissimo.nl>

#### **Bradley Sherman and Catherine Stuart, Aver Media LP (Canada)**

Aver is a Canadian-based film and television financier, and has provided finance for most major Canadian production companies. Aver has provided finance for a couple of Australian-Canadian productions, but that financing has taken place through the connection with the Canadian co-producer. It is now interested in playing a larger role in the Australian market. Aver provides a number of different financing options, including gap financing. It is willing to loan quite small amounts of money, and therefore may be of interest to documentary producers seeking cashflow opportunities for the offset. [www.averlp.com](http://www.averlp.com)

#### **Nha-Uyeh Chau, Looking Glass International (AUS)**

Looking Glass International is a boutique factual distribution and production company based in Collingwood, Victoria. It looks for unique, out of the ordinary factual storytelling. [www.lookingglassint.com](http://www.lookingglassint.com)

#### **Fiona Gilroy, Fi's Ability (AUS)**

Fiona Gilroy is a consultant to Australian film and television businesses. She can provide producers with assistance in preparing pitches for their projects. She also offers advice on business plans, rights management and constructing databases for media businesses.

**David Lawley, Indigo Film Group**

Indigo are international distributors of factual, kids and drama, including the Screen Australia funded *East of Everything*. They are currently in the last stages of putting together an investment fund, so will be looking to acquire new content in the near future. Indigo can offer advances but, as one of the few UK based distributors who is not linked to one of the “super-indies” (such as DRG), possibly not to the level of other distributors. Indigo noted the over supply of kids animation into the market, and said that they were looking for some quality live action kids programming right at the present.

[www.indigofilm.com](http://www.indigofilm.com)

**Kirstin Burgham, SBS Content Sales**

The content sales arm of public broadcaster SBS. Kirstin advised that the market had been busy, with very strong interest in SBS’ lifestyle titles and continued interest in the Screen Australia funded *First Australians*. She explained that new media buyers were out in force looking at new ways of packaging up existing content, and that for the first time they were being asked by buyers as to whether SBS Content had any 3D content.

[www.sbs.com.au/contentsales](http://www.sbs.com.au/contentsales)

**Other meetings**

Screen Australia representatives also had meetings with:

- Meredith Garlick, PFTC
- Harry Bardwell, ScreenWest
- Cate Hemmings, Compact Collections
- Mohd Mahyidin Mustakim, National Film Development Corp (Malaysia)
- Mary Ann Culpepper, National Geographic Production