

Welcome to What Happens Next – 11.22.2020
COVID, Entertainment Disruption, and the Race for the Senate
Sam Hoffman. Phil Abraham, and Josh Goldstine

Larry Bernstein ([00:40:58](#)):

I want to bring Sam and Phil into this conversation. You mentioned that you're going to have all of this data that will determine when the audience is getting bored, where they're mostly interested in. Sam or Phil, or both of you, when you start getting this data about your previous productions and how you can improve upon them potentially, how do you think you're going to use that data in your next production? Is it something that could be helpful or is it still something that you think is so much representative of the art form itself?

Phil Abraham ([00:41:44](#)):

I mean, listen, honestly I don't really see what I do being influenced by the cultural demand for certain things, truthfully. I mean, I think when I'm engaged in a project, I sort of dig into it on a script level and I sort of embrace it for what I think it could be. I am not trying to pull this kind of auteurist kind of notion to it, but I'm not marketing what I'm doing to a broad spectrum of audience. I think that's what the marketers do and that's what the people who... the studios who sort of buy the project and who commissioned the script and then hire me to make that script. I don't know if I'm pivoting in such a way saying, "Oh, gee, there's a group of people here who may not like this." I'm not internalizing that as a decision making-

Larry Bernstein ([00:42:41](#)):

So maybe just to rephrase it, maybe what the data will say is, just making something up, "Oh, we love comic book movies and we like comic book movies that have this sort of violence or this sort of sex appeal", et cetera. And then once that production company says, "You know what? You're right, we should make something like that." And then they build a script around that concept and then it shows up on your doorstep. So where in your mind is the data or new understanding of consumer desires fit into the production process?

Phil Abraham ([00:43:13](#)):

Well, I think you've just said it. I don't know if it fits into the production process, but it fits certainly into the decision processes of what projects go forward. But in terms of the nuts and bolts production of it, I think, I mean, it's simply we get the script, we figure out how to make it, and we make it. But I don't know if all the sort of data that went into figuring out that this is the script that we want then sort of trickles down and percolates into the production process. I don't know. Sam, do you sort of see a version where that could sort of be applicable?

Sam Hoffman ([00:43:54](#)):

Not on the production side. I agree with you. I think it's applicable on the development side, which generally happens at companies in LA, and they're making their decisions based on where they think the zeitgeist is going. And basically, probably also based on data that they may be getting from these streaming services. They're discussing that with the writers that they're hiring who are pitching them and who are pitching them things that they think fit in with the model that

they're seeing being successful in the future. And they're packaging that, and then they're coming to people like us to execute it. And we're going to execute it in the way that we feel is the best storytelling that we know how, which is basically the same way we would execute it without the data.

Phil Abraham ([00:44:39](#)):

Yeah. I mean, like this data thing, it's like I've had people, agents or other people sort of approach me saying, "Hey, listen, on your next project could you look for a role for this YouTube influencer or Instagram influencer?" And I'm like, "Are they actors?" I mean, I'd be happy to sort of audition them, but to sort of give someone a role in a project because they have 2 million followers? I don't think I've gone there yet. I mean, but that is a way where people do that. And all of a sudden that is an influence onto the production and physical production process of it.

Josh Goldstine ([00:45:23](#)):

And if I could interject maybe one thought is I think one of the points that I was really trying to make as well is that the data can only take you so far. And it really is this balance between the way the data looks backwards, but the way an auteur and the creative mind can really look forward and bring new things to the equation. And that really, what's sort of dynamic is the tension between the two or at least the dialogue between the two as these companies think about how to connect with people. Because I don't think that data alone can answer these questions.

Sam Hoffman ([00:46:03](#)):

Josh, you said an interesting thing about you don't think movies are going anywhere because of the sort of the lasting power of the three-act structure, et cetera. But I wonder, I mean, besides tentpoles, besides things that have established brand name because they're Marvel or because they're Borat, is there going to be a place for drama in movies in the marketing and financing world that you see coming? How is a movie, a little drama going to compete with say The Queen's Gambit, which is an exquisitely made, expensive, beautiful seven episode drama. I mean, how is there going to be a place for the little drama in feature? That's the part I don't get.

Josh Goldstine ([00:46:54](#)):

I think the answer that you're really asking about is, is there a place for that small drama in a movie theater when you have The Queen's Gambit on Netflix?

Sam Hoffman ([00:47:06](#)):

Well, and if it doesn't open in the movie theater, how does it get enough attention to make it into the Netflix algorithm to get anybody to see it? Because in the last few years, at least, and this is probably over, little movies were getting a little... buying themselves a little theater opening just to drive some publicity so that they'd get noticed on. And if they didn't get any awards, the opportunity to get noticed online is very, very limited if you're a little movie.

Josh Goldstine ([00:47:38](#)):

I think the answer is that dramas, frankly, since the seventies have sort of taken a little bit of a backseat to larger mass entertainment experiences in theaters. However, I think that it does come

down to if movies can this storytelling technique and if those dramas can connect with people, can we start to build audience around them? And one of the things that because of marketing costs and because of the challenge of opening something on 2000 screens, the question then becomes what are the outlets for these? And sometimes I think that you see some extraordinary dramas finding their way onto other platforms. And the real question is can they build audience in a sort of smaller way still in theaters?

Josh Goldstine ([00:48:27](#)):

And I think that's kind of remains to be seen and I think it's been a struggle, but I think that again, that's where the awards and the festival circuits have played such a kind of valuable role in giving some oxygen to these extraordinary stories. And I think it really does ultimately come down to the ability to sort of, to elicit emotion and to drive emotional engagement. And I think that when you can have that element, you then find that you have to then maximize that and that becomes the opportunity for marketing. Now, whether that finds itself into 2000 theaters is probably going to be less likely in the future than it has been.