Why So Short?:

The Changing World of the Short Film Industry and Online Distribution

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Abstract

This thesis examines the short film industry and how it is adapting to new online viewing platforms. It first aims to answer why short filmmakers create short films when they perform in the marketplace as an economically irrational investment. It finds several conclusions including gaining experience, funding a feature film, exploring a new genre, and escaping Hollywood pressures. After concluding why short films are made, this paper studies what the current model for short film distribution is – the film festival – observing a current oversaturation within the festival market, as well as the struggles to be noticed in a festival as a short filmmaker. Alternatively this thesis examines a new form of distribution for short filmmakers: online distribution. It explores what online distribution looks like for a short filmmaker in terms of financial earnings and audience availability. Additionally it closely studies two major players in the online video industry: YouTube and Vimeo. This thesis concludes with a comparison of festival distribution versus online distribution, as well as recommendations for future research in the short film industry.

Keywords: short film, online distribution, film festival, festival model
Why So Short?: The Changing World of the Short Film Industry and Online Distribution

As technological advancements continue to occur, simplifying film producing on a broad scale, the options for distribution are rapidly expanding. The traditional film festival model and the goal of a theatrical release are no longer standard as distribution options continue to emerge and reach new media platforms. While this current market transforms and develops, the landscape of independent cinema for filmmakers is forming alternative paths to the traditional model.

When it comes to short films, an art form frequently overlooked by Hollywood and popular culture, the options and paths for filmmakers becomes even foggier. Additionally, short films are historically a genre that lacks a significant audience and sufficient monetization, causing their high production levels to be a mystery amongst the general public. Not only are their high production levels economically irrational, but short films also have a variety of distribution options that show little to no profit. They hope to acquire millions of viewers, but produce almost no monetary compensation for those views. As the Internet continues to provide new online platforms for short films to be shared, the traditional goals and paths of short films are shifting. This thesis aims to answer three questions regarding the short film industry:

1. Why do people make short films when they are a financially irrational investment?
2. How have online platforms affected the traditional film festival distribution model?

3. What is the best practice for distribution for short filmmakers?

These questions are discussed and analyzed with information from extensive research of current literature and personal interviews with filmmakers and a film festival programmer.
Why Make Short Films?

In regards to how technology related to cameras and the Internet has developed today, the film industry is learning to accept that anyone can be a filmmaker. This has its pros and cons. A decent camera, lighting, and film software are more affordable than ever, and though they “may have made our films look better, they haven’t made us better storytellers” (Allen, 2012a). This means more voices are being heard and more stories are being told through film than ever before. However, that does not mean they are, necessarily, notable films. New filmmakers are also more eager and willing to experiment with film structures and narratives, bringing concepts like interactive films to life.

An overflow of short films and similar media, though, is also now flooding the Internet (Dargis, 2014). This makes it more difficult for rising filmmakers to be seen and discovered, as they have to stand out from thousands of other videos uploaded online every minute. Additionally, it creates an archive of free media making it difficult for filmmakers to make money for their work. An online viewer is less likely to pay for a short film when he or she could watch a different one for free (Allen, 2013b).

Another growing complication in the short film world is the rise of social media apps such as Vine and Instagram and their 6 to 10 second videos (Guerrasio, 2014). As people become more creative with the content they share on these applications, as well as having the ability to count the size of their audience and see
the effect on mainstream culture, the definition of short film is foggier than ever. Though the typical short film is at least five minutes in length, in 2013 the Tribeca Film Festival opened a new competition for Vine films: short films made using the Vine application. There were over four hundred entries with six finalists including a full range of genres from comedy to horror. These clips may have only been six seconds, but some had as many as fourteen characters and all told a story (Robertson, 2013). Because it seems like today anyone with a smartphone can give filmmaking a try, this medium puts a new spin on the words of Janet Pierson, director of the South by Southwest Film Festival: “filmmaking has become a hobby for those who can afford it,” (Dargis, 2014) because it seems like today anyone with a smartphone can give filmmaking a try. Indeed anyone with a smartphone today has a camera in his or her pocket that shoots video allowing that person to become a filmmaker.

There may be many new media to explore and blurry definitions for the short film format as well as for who qualifies as a professional filmmaker. Nevertheless, people still struggle to break into the film industry and make a living telling their stories. Today, there is an extremely small audience for short films and little money to be made, but people are still making them. The reasons filmmakers create short films can be broken down into experience, education, feature making, escaping studio pressures, exploring a new genre, or creating in a less structured format.

**Experience**

The most common and outwardly practical reason for making shorts is to gain experience. As many filmmakers will attest to, there is only so much learning about
filmmaking that can be accomplished from either an academic setting or independent study. However learning about filmmaking from media such as textbooks, classrooms, or do-it-yourself websites can only create a personal idea of what the physical process is like (Guerrasio, 2014). After all, filmmaking is “a craft, skill and technique that should be learned meticulously over a period of time, like the various trades displayed within the films themselves” (Field, 2011). Film schools will be covered in more detail later.

Moreover, feature filmmaking is a very long and expensive process that can have extreme range in terms of length and budget for the same product. Even in this year’s Academy Award selections for Best Picture, Richard Linklater’s coming of age film *Boyhood* (2014) took an astonishing twelve years to shoot while Damien Chazelle’s thriller *Whiplash* (2014) was shot in just nineteen days. These time frames exclude the time involved in the writing, development, pre-production, and post-production stages of the filmmaking process but still emphasize the time commitment and dedication that goes into creating a feature film (Kellaway, 2014; Lee, 2014). Making a feature is not a cheap, fast, or spur-of-the moment decision. In Maureen A. Ryan’s *Producer to Producer* (2010) she shares the following graphic for low budget-independent filmmaking to emphasize these struggles:
Ryan refers to this graphic as the Production Triangle. For those producing a low-budget independent film or any type of project, only two sides of the triangle are a possibility. For example, if a filmmaker wants the production to be Good and Fast, it will not be Cheap. It’s a way to remain aware of the sacrifices that might have to be made in independent film production (Ryan, 2010). Obstacles and commitments aside, to be a filmmaker one must physically practice the art of making films and refine the skills necessary to do so.

The best way a filmmaker can hone his or her skill set is to create an original film and have the experience and hands on knowledge. The simplest way to do this is with short films. Filmmaker Ryan Koo gives the analogy, “short-form content is a great way to get in reps—an athlete won’t improve if all they do is train, they have to actually get in-game experience” (Guerrasio, 2014). Physically making a film is that “in-game experience,” that, unless one is making a short film or some sort of variation, is very tedious and expensive to make. Short filmmaking is not only a method for learning the extent of work that goes into creating a film and the process, but also for
learning what worlds and stories a filmmaker is capable of producing. Ruth Bradley (2015), director of the Athens International Film and Video festivals reflects,

    If you were to make a short narrative, what it was, was to prove to a producer that you could come in on time and under budget on a project, because that’s what producers care about. Can you come in on time, make something good, come in on time, under budget . . . (personal communication, February 4, 2015)

Short films were, and still are in most cases, a wannabe Hollywood filmmaker’s resume, proving what they are capable of. They are how several feature directors today got their start, such as Spike Jonze, Ridley Scott, David Lynch, and Sofía Coppola. They created a variation of short films (television commercials) to streamline their storytelling skills as directors, eventually getting them recognized and prepared for bigger-budget work (Cipriani, 2014).

In addition to serving as a demo to an executive, short film also builds a sense of confidence about the process: “Making a solid short is not about making a feature film. Rather it’s about gaining the confidence to make a feature film” (Kander, 2013). Being able to complete the entire development, production, and post-production stages of a feature is no easy feat. It often challenges and changes filmmakers and their goals, forcing them to adapt to schedules, budgets, and other people’s priorities. Terrie Samundra (2015), winner of the Athens International Film and Video Festival in the Short Narrative category described making her short *Kunjo* (2009) as “a labour of love and made very guerilla style in a small rural village in India,” so earning recognition for the short was an important confidence boost for her filmmaking abilities (personal communication, February 9, 2015). Creating a short film can take a filmmaker through
that exact same process without the pressure that can come from a feature. Koo reiterates, “Making a short is the same process of going from script to pre-production to production to post, but it’s so much more achievable and the process is much more compact” (Guerrasio, 2014). This compact process and low cost makes short films not only a great method to gain hands-on experience, but also a method film schools rely on.

**Student Films**

Film schools across the United States commonly use the short film style with students to get them out of the classroom and behind the camera. It forces students to actually go through, as previously discussed, the full filmmaking process. A simple Google search can yield thousands of websites and online channels dedicated to displaying film school shorts, because, as well as being good practice, shorts are the first steps of that student’s career (Samson-Blaires, personal communication, February 24, 2015). Cinema programmer Peter Van Hoof describes the student short films as “the necessary stepping-stone for filmmakers to bridge the gap between film schools, and becoming a director of a feature film” (Canciani, 2014).

Student short films not only get a student behind a camera, but they also bring film students onto fully functioning film sets, teaching them different roles and levels of responsibility and skill. These experiences and group dynamics on set force students to cooperate with each other and manage working as a team. They also expose students to the many departments and roles that make up a film set, possibly
sparking an interest in a different area of film such as production design, sound, or editing (Rodriguez, personal communication, February 24, 2015).

The problem of a standard, structured short film arises as thousands of film students produce new short films every year in order to build their careers. As film critic Peter Rainer puts it, “A lot of film schools tend to promote films as resumes or studio work so then the students don’t take enough chances” (Cipriani, 2014). Most students just want to “put their stamp on something in hopes of making an impression” in Hollywood or at a film festival instead of creating a moving piece of art with purpose and intention (Cipriani, 2014). This leads to what Lauren Wissot, juror at the Bermuda International Film Festival, calls “vanity projects” where short films feel like elevator pitches by filmmakers (Guerrasio, 2014). In other words, instead of students learning to produce creative, artistic films that experiment and innovate, they create what they believe a studio executive wants to see in the hopes that they will become an independent film director. Festival director Ruth Bradley gives the unfortunate analogy:

A good friend of mine who's an independent documentarian once said that the percentage of white boys that want to become independent filmmakers and hit it big is the same percentage of inner city black youth who want to make it in the NBA. It's like .0001%. . . And unfortunately that kinda racializes it, but that's the reality of it, a number of people who are gonna get a film produced and get it distributed and get everyone to see it is like nothing compared to the number of people who want to do that.(personal communication, February 4, 2015)

The belief that students create short films as resumes builders to help them get ahead unfortunately limits and closes off creativity as they make a standard film to prove their tangible skills. The divide between the business and art of cinema is persistently
growing as film students continue to desire filmmaking for the sake of Hollywood stardom. Jukka-Pekka Laakso of the Tampere Film Festival highlights the current divide, claiming, “cinema is seen more and more as part of the industry and the only measure to assess them is money. And experimenting, seriousness and issues rarely fit in this” (Canciani, 2014). For a lucky few, though, these short films can actually lead to Hollywood stardom. In fact, sometimes the purpose behind creating a short film is to prove to studio companies that it can be a great feature.

**Going from Short to Feature**

More often than not, the pitch of a feature film is unappealing or unimaginable to an executive or studio that has the ability to fund it. In these types of scenarios, a strategy to pitch a feature is to first make a short film. As Koo (2013) writes for No Film School, “this isn’t a new approach by any means,” citing award winning films *Raising Victor Vargas* (2002), *Half Nelson* (2006), and *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (2011) as features that began as shorts. (Koo, 2013). Additionally, filmmaker Aaron Proctor (2014) compiled a list of independent feature films that were first made solely as short films or long-term web series (the list excludes features made by a director who shot a notable short film that brought them notoriety, eventually leading to an independent feature). This list includes cult classics such as *Office Space* (1999) and *Bottle Rocket* (1996), the film that launched auteur director Wes Anderson’s career. This incomplete list names a total of thirty-four films that have a short film to thank for their existence (Proctor, 2014).
One of the most topical short-to-feature success stories is this year’s *Whiplash*, which started as a short film that played at the Sundance Institute in 2013. The short brought acclaim and vision to writer-director Damien Chazelle’s script, as well as funding opportunities. In an interview with Variety magazine, he states, “the real adaptation period was actually on the short that we did to raise money for the feature” (Foundas, 2014). Chazelle is able to reap the benefits of the feature’s success: “projects that were pipe dreams before Whiplash (sic) are now feeling more realistic. I was working on something that was a little bigger scale than Whiplash (sic), and there was this question of whether I would ever get a chance to make it, and Whiplash (sic) has certainly helped a lot to put the pieces in place for that” (Foundas, 2014).

The short film *Gowanus, Brooklyn* (2004) also proves that a short film does not have to be a small-scaled version of what a filmmaker wants the feature to be. *Gowanus, Brooklyn* was eventually expanded into the Oscar nominated feature film *Half Nelson* and although it follows the same storyline, it takes a very different perspective. Focusing on the relationship between a student and teacher in an impoverished community, *Gowanus, Brooklyn* concentrates on the teacher’s side of the storyline, while *Half Nelson* follows a young girl, Drey, as the protagonist. To get the film from short to feature status, the short is able to say, “This is going to be good,” instead of “this could be good” (Koo, 2013). A guarantee is what a studio looks for before signing onto a project because feature films, as mentioned previously, are expensive risks.
Hollywood Pressures

Another benefit in making the short before the feature is a lack of Hollywood pressure. Embarking on a creative project without a big studio or an executive pushing for deadlines can make the filmmaking process more enjoyable. At the 2013 ShortsHD Short Awards, Martin Freeman won the Visionary Actor Award and announced, “I love doing [short films] for the same reason that everyone in this room really likes them – because very often it’s the time that you get to really express an idea or ideas without someone breathing down your neck or without someone arguing about how big your trailer is” (Rome, 2013). Because they are not big blockbuster hits, short films are generally ignored by Hollywood unless they have the potential to lead to bigger products or bigger stars. However, attention from Hollywood studios may be the dream for some filmmakers who are trying to hit it big in the industry.

Financing a film, even something as quick as a short, is not always easy. Just because a shooting schedule is shorter and a crew is smaller, does not necessarily mean the process is cheaper; low budget does not mean low cost. Laakso makes note of this:

Without pressure from the box office or indeed any possibility of making money, one is more "free". But of course one is also often incapable of producing the work one wants. Cinema is dependent in most cases on money created by more or less "commercial" channels….That also means that one must please a multitude of gatekeepers. That means most of the time a conservative approach is chosen. (Canciani, 2014)

The lack of Hollywood pressure can be beneficial from a creative standpoint and a stress relief standpoint. It eliminates the headache of having to satisfy a financial backer rather than focusing on the project and giving the filmmaker creative reign.
When it comes to financially creating the vision a filmmaker has, however, sometimes that pressure is preferred over the financial pressure one might endure and the creative limitations it may impose.

On an alternate note, the limited financial budget is not always a major factor in restricting a film. Having limits and no studio restrictions can also force a filmmaker to be more adventurous and creative with his or her vision. Maike Mia Höhne, curator of the Shorts division of the Berlin International Film Festival, dreams of a world where “we, including myself, think beyond budgets. A budget is not what restricts a film- it is the thinking that creates borders in whatever is important in making art” (Canciani, 2014). Filmmaker Andrew Huang told Short of the Week, “the best thing about having this technology available to us is that we can create worlds that are as lush as big Hollywood film, but narratively and conceptually so much more experimental and daring than anything that a studio would come out with” (Allen, 2013a). In the short filmmaking world, a short can be produced without Hollywood pressure, and Hollywood money is not necessary to produce a big world. In fact, because they serve as this testing ground in film for what does and does not work, short films can be some of the most creative and innovative projects being made.

A new type of filmmaking people are beginning to experiment with is interactive filmmaking. Short filmmaker Andrew Allen (2013b) explains, “we purposefully hid 16 encrypted messages in the visuals of the film. At festival screenings, they went by too quickly to read and decipher. Online, where viewers control the playhead, they went back to dig deeper and the story became more
meaningful.” This experimentation with interactive film was more successful in its online viewing opposed to a theatrical release. Those creating short films have less pressure and more room for experimentation with the process. They are innovating viewing formats and ways to interact with new audiences as technology in media and film continues to expand, something that is much riskier to do with a larger budget and no guarantee of returns. This is why Casey Cipriani (2014) quotes filmmaker Michael Lukk Litwak when he says:

‘Shorts give you a lot of time to find your voice as a filmmaker,’ [Filmmaker Michael Lukk Litwak] said. ‘There’s a lot of pressure. If you make a ten million dollar film and you mess it up, no one’s ever going to give you ten million dollars ever again. Whereas if you make a short for a thousand dollars and it’s a bust, then it’s (sic) the only thing you’ve lost is maybe five or ten days and $1,000.’ (2014)

The low-risk, low-pressure set up of a short can therefore provide many benefits in terms of both creativity as an artist and innovation in the film industry. Some short films are still made, though, with some Hollywood pressures and stresses. This is the case for filmmakers who are trying to branch out and prove their creative abilities before that ten million dollar bust occurs. Sometimes a short, as mentioned previously, is that final push a filmmaker needs to tell an investor that he or she is capable of the job.

**New Genre**

When a filmmaker produces a hit feature or short, it illustrates for Hollywood a clear image of what that artist is capable of creating. This has an upside and a downside. On the upside, it shows a producer or a studio the filmmaker’s skills and abilities on a set. Physically creating what a filmmaker visualizes is not always
straightforward, so when a project is completed in a specific tone or style, it’s a
checkmark on a list of what this filmmaker is capable of creating. Jill Soloway (2014),
the writer-director of the award winning comedy series *Transparent* (2014) discussed
creating shorts and a feature as a guarantee for executives of what product she is
capable of producing. As the keynote speaker at the 2014 Film Independent Forum,
she shared what she told the Head of Comedy at a meeting with Amazon Studios:

If you liked the movie, I can make a pilot that feels very similar. I have the
cinematographer and editor and the hair and makeup person and the wardrobe
chick to make it look the way that movie looked. I have a technique that I can
use with actors that allows me to get the kinds of performances you saw in that
film. Most of the people who come in to see you with a script can't guarantee
much by the time a director and a producer gets involved. The tone can
evaporate right before your eyes. As a writer, director and producer, I am now
able to tell you I can guarantee the tone. (2014)

Soloway received the go-ahead from Amazon Studios and created her series
*Transparent*, which brought the studio two Golden Globe wins in 2015. In the
unpredictable film industry, a guarantee on mise en scene is a rare commodity.

On the downside, this tone and genre guarantee sometimes locks a filmmaker
into a certain type of film. If a director has a hit science fiction romance, he or she
may be sent multiple project pitches for science fiction romance, thereby giving the
director more opportunity to create, but also putting barriers around what they create.
Or, as Koo puts it:

“Whatever the tone and genre of your short film, that's what the industry is
going to expect you to specialize in,” he says. “If you make a dramatic short
don't expect it to further your comedy career and vice versa. After I make my
basketball feature, I'll probably have the opportunity to make other sports
films. That might be a good time to make another short to prove myself in
another genre. The cycle repeats. (Guerrasio, 2014).
For some, it can be a trap. To escape the cycle, that same filmmaker can make a short film in a different genre to further prove skill level and ability and hopefully get him or her out of the cycle. After several short films, TV movies, and online skits, Todd Strauss-Schulson hit it big when he signed on to direct *A Very Harold and Kumar Christmas* (2011). A very specific genre, Strauss-Schulson “was thought to be a budding young studio comedy director” (Guerrasio, 2014). After *A Very Harold and Kumar Christmas* came out, he was sent multiple scripts for movies such as “stoner buddy comedies and Kevin James vehicles like *Fart College* about a middle aged man who goes back to college to major in farts,” which was not the material he was hoping to make an impression with. To prove his ability in a more serious genre, Strauss-Schulson made the short film *Valibation* (2013), a dark comedy-mystery with a much darker tone. He now awaits the 2015 release of his comedy-horror film *The Final Girls*, which mimics a look similar to *Valibation* (*Valibation*, 2013; *The Final Girls*, 2015). Strauss-Schulson credits the shorts with telling the industry and audiences who he is beyond these comedies in a professional approach (Guerrasio, 2014).

**Creativity**

Short filmmakers are not just in the short filmmaking industry in the hopes of getting picked up by Hollywood. Although these films are good tools to help build a career and resume, the heart of the film should be the intention and the artist’s need to create. Hollywood and big studios are a great place to get large productions and visions picked up, but several people work exclusively in a short film format (Gorochow, 2013). As short filmmaker, David O’Reilly states, “short films are the
most progressive form of filmmaking on earth,” whose only downside is “they do not function well as a commodity because they are more of an unknown quantity to the viewer” (Gorochow, 2013). Previously an under-viewed medium, the rise of the Internet and media outlets such as YouTube and Vimeo are forcing distributors and filmmakers alike to develop online distribution and marketing plans for short films. This will be discussed further later on.

In an interview, Bradley had several strong opinions regarding filmmakers as artists and those who want to make it to Hollywood. She believes people make films and submit them to the small festival to “just make something” (personal communication, February 4, 2015) She says:

A lot of films don't tell stories anymore. They're abstract films or documentaries, which also tell stories. So, part of it is like why do people want to make a movie? And then if you make a movie you want people to see it, so even if you get 30 people in Athens, OH to see your movie, it's something, it's like ‘I made this,’ (personal communication, February 4, 2015)

For many filmmakers, the goal is not Hollywood or making millions. Filmmaking is an artistic form of expression that the artist uses to communicate an idea or a message. The short form has very few rules and standards with storytelling, allowing a filmmaker to express and create with few limitations or guidelines. As a result, these short films, as discussed previously, are some of the most innovative and experimental, ideally causing the viewer to learn or think in a new way (Guerrasio, 2014; Dietza, 2013). Film critic Lars Henrik notes that, “being forced to think differently is something that only cinema still can impose on us,” (Canciani, 2014) especially in the short format.
Unwatched Medium

A filmmaker runs into some dilemmas if his or her goal is to acquire a large audience for their art. Short films can be one of the most under watched mediums of motion pictures. There are exceptions, however, depending on what the short format is. For example, short films such as television commercials and music videos have much larger audiences. Every year, millions of dollars are spent on Super Bowl commercials that tell a story to resonate with a consumer during the game (Topic: Super Bowl, 2015). Even movie trailers today are developing into a debated short film format.

For the everyday filmmaker, however, “unless it becomes a meme, [your short] will only be seen by your friends, family and maybe a film festival audience” (Guerrasio, 2014). No longer shown before feature films, although Disney occasionally brings this cinema tradition back (Miller, 2015), short films do not have a strong revenue stream or common home amongst distribution and sales agents. Richard Brody (2014a) of The New Yorker states this most clearly when he writes, “there’s almost no theatrical or home-video showcase for short films.” Filmmakers and sales agents still are not sure what to do with them. These pieces are sometimes released on iTunes or can be watched on popular short film viewing platforms online, sometimes for a fee. This area of distribution is still developing and faces the issue of paying for online media.

The rise of the Internet has proven, however, that there is an appetite for shorts. Several websites exist solely for short film viewing, gathering thousands of viewers a
week to rank their favorite shorts and post about current issues and developments in the short film world. These websites, such as Short of the Week and Vimeo, create a community of short filmmakers to create and share with each other.

The new accessibility of filmmaking equipment and websites such as YouTube and Vimeo create a supersaturated environment for short films. Allen (2012a) of Short of the Week points out the “real competition is the 5,000 other dramas shot with shallow depth-of-field and digital effects that go up every week.” When millions have access to the equipment and the Internet, standing out in a sea of short films is difficult. What most filmmakers need to get an audience for their short film beyond friends and family is luck.

Making Money

Not only is it incredibly difficult to find an audience for short films, but Allen notes it is also almost impossible to make a living as a short filmmaker (Guerrasio, 2014). Van Hoof backs up Allen’s statement by stating, “no one within short film, including the filmmakers, can make a living out of it” (Canciani, 2014). This lack of financial revenue in the industry draws up the cause for several points previously discussed.

The lack of audience for short films as well as the oversaturation of free online media is one of the leading explanations for why short films do not make as much money compared to feature films. Some viewing platforms are experimenting with methods so viewers can pay to watch a short film or donate to the filmmaker, but this places a hurdle between a filmmaker and his or her potential audience: a major
problem when the artistic goal of filmmaking is to have the art seen. Allen (2013c) explains that this “pay per view model means payment is still a barrier no matter how minor, and that cuts down on impulse views, something the online world thrives on,” a significant obstacle when most short filmmakers release their content online.

Filmmakers are not always focused on making money. Before someone pays the filmmaker to create, he or she is paying for the film through grants, donations, favors, and/or personal savings. How much money is spent on creating a short film is determined on a project-by-project basis Some can be made for next to nothing and some can cost thousands: “Strauss-Schulson says he often uses his own money to make the shorts, or will split with his producer (sometimes even the actors pitch in). And though he loses money on them, he doesn’t know a better way to spend it” (Guerrasio, 2014). The drive of an artist to continue creating and telling stories, however, pushes these filmmakers to make films regardless of whether or not it is a good investment from a producer’s standpoint.

In contrast, every short does not necessarily have to cost money. In his recent keynote address at the 2015 South by Southwest Film Festival, filmmaker Mark Duplass (2015) discusses the three dollar short: “The first step is the three dollar short film. I can definitely speak to this. We’re in a place now obviously where technology is so cheap, there is no excuse for you not to be making short films on the weekends with your friends, on your iPhone.” He discusses the quality of work that can arise from the three-dollar short versus the $65,000 short and how the financial pressures and expectations can affect the product. Today’s technology allows for more
financially strategic ways to create and make it in Hollywood. It no longer costs thousands of dollars to make a film, but it also is more difficult to make thousands on a film – especially a short film. In an interview, writer-director David Schechter gave an interesting perspective on the purpose of short films regarding favors:

‘Most people get to ask their family and friends for money once,’ he explains. ‘Get one opportunity to ask a sound designer to do a free mix. One chance to get a famous actor to do a role; a DP with a great camera to shoot their film for nothing. To get a festival to waive their submission fee and fly them out. “Feature” is a much sexier word than “short.” You get more favors and you get better favors by those looking to build their resume. And by the time you're done, for practically the same cost—if you're clever—you have a feature-length calling card that can, in itself, be a way to recoup your investment and forward your career significantly (Guerriasio, 2014)

Schechter makes a very interesting point in the short versus feature debate. Short films indeed tend to be more experimental and innovative. They can be a more financially strategic decision; they can give a filmmaker experience, build a resume, be a calling card for a feature, escape big studio pressures, and explore new genres. Unfortunately short films make almost no revenue and are difficult to find an audience for. At the end of the day, making a feature may be the smarter move. Not every filmmaker has these favors from crewmembers ready to go, however, and they also may not have the time to invest. If time is not an issue and an experienced filmmaker has a story he or she cannot get funded that they believe in, taking on the feature can be the better decision. Making a financial profit is not always the goal, nor is making it to Hollywood, but as Schechter points out, “‘Feature’ is a much sexier word than ‘short’” today, and a feature may be able to get a filmmaker further than a short ever will.
The Changing Age of Distribution: Film Festivals

For those who choose to make a short film, regardless of the reason, the next logical step is to find an audience to share the work with. Traditionally, filmmakers enter into film festivals to show their film, generate interest from sales agents and distributors, and sell them. In technical terms, “film festivals can be understood as temporary organizations in which values, both economic and aesthetic, are constructed and attached to films, to forms and processes of film making, and to industry actors” (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). They appear, usually annually, in a city or singular theater, to bring various films and their creators for both judging and networking. These events bring both cultural and economic value to a city, serving as a tourist attraction for both arts and entertainment (Ooi & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010).

Along with bringing tourism to a city, film festivals offer various competitions, courses, and exhibitions throughout the event. The most obvious event that occurs at festivals are the many competitions for the best films in different categories, as well as more specific awards regarding the talent involved in the creation of a film. Established juries award some of these while others are based on audience votes. Various classes and workshops are held to assist filmmakers and screenwriters on their work, providing feedback and criticism on drafts. Additionally festivals tend to choose an overall topic or theme and bring multiple films and speakers to the festival revolving around that theme. They also frequently have sales agents and distributors present to buy films and sell them to theaters across the U.S. and around the world.
Sales agents can be defined as partners to the filmmakers who represent a film in the marketplace (Ryan, 2010). They work with the filmmaker to build a marketing strategy and use their contacts to have the film purchased by a distribution company. In summary, sales agents are middlemen between the filmmaker and distribution companies. Distributors work to get the film seen in a variety of platforms: this depends on variables such as audience, genre, and budget. Some of these platforms include international sales, theatrical sales, television sales, and Video On Demand (VOD) sales (Ryan, 2010; Peranson, 2008). As discussed below, however, the roles of sales agents and distributors are seriously changing in the industry landscape. Because sales agents and distribution companies both take percentages of a film’s revenue for their involvement, it may be in the best interest of a small filmmaker to self distribute his or her film. This involves a significant amount of work and time, and can be near to impossible if a filmmaker lacks the industry connections a sales agent has.

Along with the screenings and workshops, most festivals involve social events such as parties and receptions where more networking amongst the filmmakers and talent can occur. Several deals with distributors are also known to happen here. All of these events together provide a full week’s or weekend’s agenda, thus forming the film festival (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen 2010).

It is important to distinguish between two different types of festivals: audience festivals and business festivals. A chart can be found below from Mark Peranson’s *First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals*
(2008), defining the important differences between the two. Additional information pertaining to their differences can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1: “Chart 1: Two models for understanding film festivals” M. Peranson (2008) First you get the power then you get the money: Two models of film festivals

As seen above, a business festival focuses more on a marketable presence, major competitions and awards, celebrities, and Hollywood involvement. Some business festivals include Venice International Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Cannes International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), and Toronto
International Film Festival. Smaller festivals, which are typically more local, are either striving to become a business festival or focus on being an audience festival. These events generally have a small staff, no investment in the screening films, little Hollywood involvement, and are content to remain the same size (Peranson, 2008).

An example of a small festival striving to become a business festival is the Cleveland International Film Festival, which Bradley (2015) points out it is just "$50 a guest to go on the red carpet" (personal communication, February 4, 2015). The local Athens International Film and Video Festival proudly acknowledges its audience festival status where Bradley enjoys that no deals are being made in the cinema lobby, but instead people are enjoying the recent experience in the theatre they all shared together (personal communication, February 4, 2015). To discuss the possible benefits that can be derived for a filmmaker from a distribution perspective, however, the remainder of this section will focus on Business Festivals and the atmosphere they provide unless specified otherwise.

**Becoming Accepted**

Before a filmmaker can reap the benefits of having his or her film play at a film festival, he or she must first be accepted through the submission process. Nowadays, when everyone has the ability to make a film and wants it to be seen, competition continues to stiffen every year, especially amongst major festivals. The Cannes Independent Film Festival has seen the entries in their Marché du Film more than double in the last twenty years (Number Films 2014, 2015). Festivals are receiving more entries than ever still with only a limited number of slots for films in
both large and small film festivals. The renowned Sundance Film Festival in Park City, UT received 12,218 film submissions for their 2015 festival of only 193 slots – a 1.58% acceptance rate. These slots were not all equal, either. Those spaces include short films, feature films, international shorts and features, documentary features and shorts, exhibition specials, etc. (Roston, 2013; Festival Program, 2015; Submitting to the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, 2014) This means that a filmmaker’s chance of being accepted into the festival is even more limited, depending on the category he or she is trying to enter.

It’s not just the larger festivals getting these submission numbers, either. The Athens International Film and Video Festival has been a spectacle in rural Athens, OH for 42 years. Back in 2008 the festival had over 700 entries for 157 slots (The Little Festival that Could, 2008). In recent years it has received around 1000 entries, with the inability to accept more due to the small staff size (Gottlieb, 2015). However, this is a festival, that does not boast about wide industry connections. Instead it is a smaller festival focused more on the artistic value and appreciation of the films (Bradley, personal communication, February 4, 2015).

Similar to the college application process, to submit a film to a festival, there is an entry fee. The fees range depending on the festival and entry deadline. Major business festivals with a higher concentration of industry connections, what Bradley refers to as “Type A Festivals” (personal communication, February 4, 2015), and their corresponding entry fee amounts, can be found in Appendix B. As a short filmmaker trying to break into the industry, one of the most traditional and proven methods for
getting noticed is through festivals. To have a better chance of being discovered, a filmmaker may want to enter as many festivals as possible, which can quickly add up in terms of cost. The benefits if accepted can be well worth it, though, because “despite high application costs, [it means] access to live audiences, but more importantly, to producing powers that [can] provide a future budget or a distribution [deal] engineered by expert marketers” (Gorochow, 2013). Ideally, this will help a filmmaker launch his or her next project.

If accepted into a film festival, a filmmaker can immediately receive exposure for his or her work by being a part of the program and buzz that surrounds the festival. For example, “we’ve all bought into the myth: The Sundance Film Festival is an acquisitions hotbed where the ‘next big thing’ is just waiting to be discovered” (Mohr and Gardner, 2003) and as soon as the films screen, hundreds of reviews from critics are released detailing the best and worst of America’s largest film festival. In fact, pre-Internet festival screenings for films were almost irrelevant to those outside the festival circuit because the press was not widely released. Technology today, however, allows for reviews of the festivals and their films to overflow media and entertainment outlets before these filmmakers even go on to sign release or distribution deals. This in turn gives film critics a major upper hand in predicting the future for filmmakers across the festival route (Brody, 2014).

As the film festival has turned into a media event for the entertainment industry, the participation in these festivals provides the major creators with an otherwise unfathomable amount of exposure. Studies show that “winning an award in
Cannes appears as ‘the most commercially valuable endorsement’” (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010), but regardless of the festival, a filmmaker’s film is being screened in front of an audience that cares about film and film quality. A film is not just getting publicity, though; it is getting publicity with distributors and producers that can move a filmmaker’s career forward (Roston, 2013).

**Media Attention**

It can be argued that some festivals are all about the parties. Most festivals involve a variety of events that encourage social engagements among the festival participants. A common lack of variety in programming among an overabundance of festivals leads the directors of audience festivals like Bradley to believe some filmmakers and film buffs alike only attend festivals for the parties (personal communication, February 4, 2015). Although they are enjoyable social events, “Festivals are places of power and power relations that are characterized by complex and often hidden relationships between multiple constituents, for example between distributors and agents on the one hand and festival organizers on the other (Rüling, & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). These social parties are networking opportunities for filmmakers with industry bigwigs as well as other filmmakers to collaborate and share projects and ideas with. Festival programmer and short film manager Laurence Reymond reiterates this: “This is one great thing about festivals, people are there to share things. Not only films” (Canciani, 2014). There are parties and celebrations at festivals indeed, but these events are also budding opportunities for a filmmaker looking to break further into the film world.
Distribution Deals

As an emerging filmmaker the traditional goal beyond screening a short is landing a distribution deal. After a filmmaker donates their time to the festival circuit, reaping the awards and benefits that come with screening at festivals, he or she may aspire to sell the film in some format to try and reach a broader audience (Mohr and Gardner, 2003). Ideally a distributor will make a deal with a filmmaker to give the film some variation of a release package. This will help put their product on the screens for more viewers while simultaneously earning a profit. Some filmmakers can become very attached to traditional distribution methods. Jonathan Sehring, the head of IFC Entertainment wrote, “It never ceases to amaze me how important a theatrical release is to many filmmakers, (though it is often) to the detriment of investors” (Mohr and Gardner, 2003), because sometimes an expensive theatrical release can end up costing even more money than ever being profitable (Marsh, 2014).

Consequently, distribution deals are not always cost advantageous options for the filmmaker, especially in the shorts category. In fact as short filmmaker Jordan Bayne (2014) found out, they can be quite expensive: “When I was first offered the deal, the deliverables were another expense that, as a filmmaker struggling to make festival fees and rent, I couldn’t get ahead fast enough financially to ever pull everything together.” In a mainstream distribution deal, a filmmaker will sell his or her film for a flat rate to a distributor who will then cover release and marketing costs, hoping to earn back revenue through eventual ticket sales, rental fees, etc. Therefore if the earnings on the film never surpass the distributor’s fees for both the releasing the
film and the general distribution services, a filmmaker could never see a profit from selling their work (Marsh, 2014; Kander, 2013). Filmmakers are beginning to experiment and learn with practice what the distribution options are, as the Internet and independent filmmaker websites make the buying and selling process more transparent.

These traditional distribution deals are becoming increasingly more difficult to come by as well because short films are considered an unmarketable theatrical film for an audience-goer. PES, director of the short film “Fresh Guacamole” (2012) explains, “It’s difficult to tell people to go to a theater to watch a 1-2 minute film. I can make ideas and put them out there, and they can influence people and build a reputation that brings more opportunities to make more films,” (Yamato, 2013). Getting a consumer to a theatre for a quick short is proving difficult. This does not mean screening a short film at a festival cannot land a filmmaker a different type of deal, such as the funding to make another short or the funding to develop a short into a feature. As an artist, however, a filmmaker’s intentions for his or her film can be different than a distributor’s: “A distributor might not care about a film’s lasting power so long as it earns back its investment. But artists may be right to be concerned about whether their work will matter” (Marsh, 2014). This depends exclusively on the short and the filmmaker and what they see as a successful outcome for their film, be it financial or creative (P. Christopher, personal communication, February 24, 2015). Some filmmakers may just be happy with their film finding a larger audience at the festival and a home amongst other similar shorts and filmmakers.
Limited Programming

As the festival culture continues to grow in addition to a rise in filmmakers, major festivals are forced to be more selective about their festival programming to the detriment of struggling filmmakers. There are several reasons a film can be rejected from a festival, many of which have nothing to do with a film’s quality. For example, a festival may not accept certain films simply because “they don’t fit the programming needs of the festival” (Allen, 2013b). If there are ongoing themes in segments of short films, and a film does not go with any of these categories, it most likely will be rejected. Furthermore, if the segments for short films all run long in length and a filmmaker’s short film is equally long it may be rejected for the sake of time. To avoid being rejected by festival programmers and wasting entry fee dollars, filmmakers can follow the tactics of Jesus Orellana (2012), a short filmmaker who received a deal to make a feature film with 20th Century Fox after releasing his short. In an interview with Short of the Week, Orellana says he “practiced strategic self-promotion and marketing, sending it to select, important festivals and websites that were instantly taken with his content” (Kander, 2012). Doing the research into a festival’s reputation and audience market can save a filmmaker both time and money and possibly save them from a festival route of rejection.

As mentioned previously, Sundance Film Festival had a 1.58% acceptance rate this past year, not much better than where the festival stood eleven years prior: Over 5,000 films submitted for 219 slots. Even Sundance Film Festival Director John Cooper realizes the improbable odds for filmmakers and how the industry has
changed. He adds, “we reject films that would have been shown 20 years ago” (Roston, 2013). Although a filmmaker may be disappointed with a more than likely festival rejection, a bright side to this loss is not being overshadowed by bigger names and films: “Not getting into Sundance can mean not getting lost at Sundance” (Roston, 2013). A rejection email can force the filmmaker to look into other options to put his or her film in front of an audience.

The rise of film festival popularity for media attention also has brought about a new issue with festivals – they are everywhere. In just the city of Toronto there are approximately fifty-seven different film festivals (Dietze, 2013). That is more than one festival every week of the year, and fifty-six of these festivals compete with the Toronto International Film Festival, a major business festival. Bradley reflects on her time in the supersaturated festival industry by sharing this anecdote,

The thing is, when I started out in this business 40 years ago there weren't that many festivals. Now everybody and their mother has a festival. And most of them are pretty crappy and they're all cookie cutters. Everybody thinks they've gotta have a festival and they're all cookie cutters and they all wanna be just like Sundance and it's ridiculous, you can't be just like Sundance and why would you want to be like Sundance? There already is a Sundance. So, you know, people that's what they read in the popular press so they think 'oh this is good for the economy and good for business and good for the town' and they try to get some 2-bit Hollywood actor to come and its like, I'm not interested in that. I really don't care. (personal communication, February 4, 2015)

The oversaturation has become so out of hand that the popular festival entry website Withoutabox.com lists over 5,000 festivals for filmmakers to enter throughout the year (FAQ, 2015). Filmmakers wanting to win awards for their resumes and film reels as a sign of notoriety has also encouraged the large increase in festivals. For more
independent audience festivals, like the Athens International Film and Video Festival, the focus is less on the awards, competition, and market representation and more on the cultural value and significance of the films. Director Bradley recalls:

We had a filmmaker here years ago who was really irritated because we didn't have a limo to carry him around or anything. And then he said to me one day, he says 'this is the only festival I've ever been at where there's nobody's, not everybody's on their cell phone making deals in the lobby' and I went 'Yea that's right' and he realized that I took that as a compliment even though he meant it as an insult. (Personal communication, February 4, 2015)

She encourages the festival to stay away from the Oscar and Hollywood mindset and to avoid “being the Flavor of the Month” (personal communication, February 4, 2015) even though the festival sees a majority of international submissions. This is due to its Oscar Qualifying Festival status in the Shorts category. This means if a short film wins the Athens International Film and Video Festival in the Short Film category it goes into the running to be nominated for an Academy Award. Bradley continues, discussing larger film festivals and the value behind these awards, saying:

They're big 'A' Festivals, there's Berlin and Toronto, and Carlo Vary, Vince, those are like A Festivals, and then Cannes. And then there’s like B Festivals, and now there are like 10,000 little festivals everywhere. And you know I just read stuff all the time like "award winning filmmaker" and I'm like, everyone's an award winning filmmaker, everyone's an award winning filmmaker. That means nothing anymore. That means absolutely nothing. (Personal communication, February 4, 2015)

Those looking at films for artistic value understand that winning at a festival does not necessarily hold any merit, especially when festivals appear to be getting lost in an over stuffed festival market. Sometimes, to a short filmmaker looking for financial success or a larger audience, the best option may be to skip the festival circuit entirely.
The Changing Age of Distribution: Online Distribution

A new, emerging method of film distribution that is finding a place for short form content is online distribution. The typical festival-to-distributor route brings credibility to a filmmaker’s name and work, but cutting out the middleman leaves the filmmaker with more revenue to continue creating (Gorochow, 2013). Allen (2013) from Short of the Week recognizes the humility this can require of some filmmakers with the analogy, “putting your work online can feel like becoming a street performer after playing at a concert hall.” Several filmmakers, like Robyn Miller, argue that “The festival model is old” (Roston, 2013), and going online to get directly to an audience is the way to go, but it’s also still a developing market and field. Theaters are becoming a dying industry and online distribution for short filmmakers is cost effective, reaches a wide audience, and builds a fan base and market for the filmmaker. However, there are downsides to online distribution, such as content overflow, low financial reward, and loss of ownership and viewer control. Watching a film online also puts the work in an entirely new medium that, as discussed below, may have different rules. There are also still debates taking place over different online platforms to release a film on and what the cost of online versus a festival truly is. The online distribution market is quickly growing and developing, though, and for short filmmakers it is the new way to market work.

Dying Theatres

As ticket prices continue to rise and Hollywood relies less and less on original stories and content, movie theatres are clearing out. In 2012, theatrical attendance was
at a sixteen-year low, and younger, more tech-savvy filmmakers were already
beginning to test the online waters (Dickey). Allen (2012b) of Short of the Week also
recognizes “Box office sales [were] down 3.8% compared to last year and attendance
down 4.7%.” Trends in the film industry today are seeing what used to be well-crafted
independent cinema moving towards television and online platforms, while sequels,
book-to-movie, and remake deals take over the theaters (Mark Duplass, 2015; Allen,
2012b). In 1981, seven of the top-grossing box office films were original stories. This
number decreased to two top ten original stories in 2001, and again down to zero in
2011. The ten highest grossing films in 2011 were all either adaptations (like Thor and
Captain America) or sequels. Three of these are sequels from series that have lasted
ten years. These films include the Harry Potter films, the Planet of the Apes films, and
the Fast and the Furious films. The highest grossing original story from 2011 ranks
fourteenth with the female-driven comedy Bridesmaids. A graphic representation of
this data and more from 2001 to 2011 can be found in Appendix C. As these
productions become more expensive to produce, Hollywood continues to make less
original content and stays with safer investments. Sequels and adaptations already
have a large fan base, leading to automatic media attention and a high box office
turnout. Most notably, Disney has begun a string of live-action remakes of its
animated classics that first brought the company to fame. There is no reason to not
make these films either, since they are turning large profits for the studios. In its
opening weekend, the Cinderella (2015) remake made over $67.8 million (Cinderella
(2015), 2015). Disney also experimented with re-releasing hits in 3D in theaters
again. In 2011, for $10 million, Disney made *The Lion King* 3D and grossed over $90 million domestically (Allen, 2012b; The Lion King (In 3D) (2011), 2015). Because of this surge in original theatre programming, when a budding filmmaker is looking to create and experiment with short, original films, the online market is more welcoming than ever before.

Additionally, unlike the theatrical model, posting a short film online is virtually free. It does, however, depend on the platform used to distribute, which will be discussed more below. Some websites require membership fees for the service of displaying a film. When compared to the price of theatrical release, alternatively, a membership fee to post online is still a much more cost-advantageous option. In an interview with Short of the Week, short filmmaker Tom Jenkins shares that “the Internet has enabled us to find this sort of affirmation from millions for free” (Kander, 2012). It is not just a free option, but compared to the limited screenings at film festivals, sharing a film online can also expose a filmmaker’s work to millions of viewers across the globe.

It is no shock that sharing a film online exposes it to a broader audience. At a film festival the audience is certainly more made up of those with an interest in cinema and short films, but a film online allows anyone to view, share, and discuss the work at any time (Allen, 2013b). From an artist’s perspective, the voice and message of the film is shared with more people because “Online films can be watched just about anywhere” (Allen, 2013b). Sometimes, for a filmmaker, the significance and notoriety of the audience is not important. What is significant is that an audience is sitting down
and enjoying a piece of work the filmmaker created (Bradley, personal communication, February 3, 2015).

Also, just because the audience is an anonymous pool of views behind a screen does not mean some of the viewers are not the film enthusiasts or executives a filmmaker might find at a festival. As previously mentioned, Jordan Bayne is a short filmmaker who found the classic distribution model for shorts to be too expensive: she was unable to keep up with the fees. Through research she learned “filmmakers who were getting their voices heard were giving their films away on Vimeo” (2014), which is where she eventually ended up sending her short film “The Sea is All I Know” (2011). PES, who created the short “Fresh Guacamole” (2012), found his industry breakthrough via the online market:

Sharing work for free on the Internet has significant non-financial rewards for a filmmaker. It’s what he says brought him to Showtime’s attention in the first place, which led them to give him free creative reign to make Fresh Guacamole. ‘I’ve been posting my films online for over 10 years – I believe in making my films and sharing them with the world.’ (Yamato, 2013)

Placing a film online does not necessarily mean the important viewers at a festival will never see the work. The online market, however, only offers up the potential for the largest audience. Online film “makes it possible for movies that might otherwise remain unseen or hardly-seen to reach viewers across the country – if those viewers become aware of the works in question” (Brody, 2013). After a filmmaker uploads his or her work, there will not be an automatic one million viewers. The point of making motion picture works, as Orellana knows, “is for people to watch them” (Kander, 2012). Unlike a festival screening, online platforms come with special data analytics
features that allow the filmmakers to track their views and online presence. This makes marketing a short film much easier and more probable for an aspiring do-it-yourselfer.

**Building a Fan Base and Crowdfunding**

Collecting views and attention for a short film online can ideally lead to a more meaningful, long-term gain: a group of fans. If a filmmaker’s work is readily available online, viewers can easily watch an entire portfolio of that filmmaker if they wish. This can create fans of a filmmaker’s style or genre that may help provide future media buzz and funds for more work. Filmmakers are not just looking for a few shares and views on an online platform; they are looking for people who will eventually invest in their work (Bayne, 2014).

This new phenomenon is referred to as crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is defined as “the creation and growth of virtual social networks of people who provide resources for cultural production” (Luka, 2012). If a new filmmaker can create a series of short films and build a fan base he or she can use popular crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter.com or Indiegogo.com to fundraise another film. Even already established filmmakers are turning to crowdfunding to help get original projects off the ground. In 2013, Spike Lee began crowdfunding for his film *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2014). He was able to raise just under $1.5 million using fans interested in seeing another Spike Lee project (The Newest Hottest Spike Lee Joint, 2014). Without an already developed fan base, it is extremely unlikely that a filmmaker can fundraise for future projects.
Unless a filmmaker is new to the industry and only has one short or sample of work to upload, sharing multiple works to fully exemplify skill level is important. A filmmaker does not want a viewer to watch and then forget about his or her work. Producer Ted Hope describes this process: “And when I’m done with my movie, I don’t want to lose them. I’ve got to make sure that I stay engaged with them and give them the bridge to the next work” (Kaufman, 2011). Viewers that enjoy a specific online channel or profile of a filmmaker can follow that individual and stay up-to-date on projects and industry progress, making them more likely to donate to the creative work: “Transactions aim to be personal. People give money on Kickstarter for different reasons but underlying the choice to fund is a want for another to succeed” (Gorochow, 2013). Additionally, when it comes to breaking into Hollywood, having an online fan base for a studio executive or agency proves a filmmaker’s work can successfully connect with people, generate buzz, and hopefully create a profit, thereby reducing risk on their end of the deal (Kander, 2012).

The Middleman

All of the online effort comes with another bonus: a filmmaker cuts out the distributor and sales agent process and fees. There is no effort exerted by the filmmaker to try and earn a distributor’s attention and no profit lost in having to pay a distributor for the work. It does mean more work for the filmmaker, though (Field, 2011). This new method is especially beneficial for new filmmakers who have yet to make a name for themselves. The added challenge for them, as Producer Ted Hope states, is convincing viewers to pick their film: “You have to build the ramp to get us
to watch the movie. You have to get us to say, ‘Kurosawa may be one of the greatest filmmakers ever, but tonight I’m going to watch Joe Blow’s $20,000 debut film’” (Kaufman, 2011). It is not always an easy task, but sometimes, for the sake of finances, a necessary one. Self-distributing work online takes more time and knowledge that may be beyond what a filmmaker wishes to do. Short filmmaker Eddie O’Keefe acknowledges, though, “with the internet you can seek your audience out yourself. You’re in control, not a festival programmer. And over the last year I’ve seen this method of ‘distribution’ be embraced more and more by filmmakers” (Allen, 2012c). It gives the filmmaker the opportunity to brand his or her film and audience rather than relying on how a distributor wants to market the work.

**Shorts International**

The transparency of popular distribution companies coming to light is also an encouragement for young filmmakers to self-distribute their work. Shorts International is a company that assembles and distributes the Oscar nominated Live Action Shorts and Animated Shorts every year to theaters, On Demand, and on iTunes (Yamato, 2013). Having a short film distributed through Shorts International provides several benefits to filmmakers, including professional prestige and legitimacy. It is also one of the easiest ways to get a film on iTunes (Kander, 2013a). Apple states, “iTunes accepts feature-length motion pictures or documentaries that were initially released either in theaters or directly to video, as well as short films of theatrical or DVD quality,” and they do not accept “adult movies, how-to videos, user-generated content, and other video types that are not normally considered to be motion pictures or
documentaries” (Sell Your Content - Movie Provider: FAQs, 2015). Getting a film on iTunes is not so straightforward, though. Most filmmakers look to an aggregator for assistance, which is where Shorts International comes in.

The Shorts International route, however, involves doing things the company’s way. As well as being able to promote that an individual’s film is being distributed by Shorts International, the “Filmmakers are paid a $5,000 flat fee advance for inclusion in the program and earn a 50/50 split on receipts after ShortHD recoups operational costs” (Yamato, 2013). ShortsHD is a high definition channel through Shorts International (Shorts International About, 2012). As Ivan Kander (2013a) of Short of the Week notes, Shorts International is known for “[distributing] some of the best short films in the world.” In return, they receive the rights to distribute the filmmaker’s films through their various outlets. Recently, however, several filmmakers’ issues with the company have been made public. For example, “After a screening at the 2011 Hollyshorts festival, [filmmaker Vicky Matthews] was approached by Shorts International about potential distribution. Since Matthews was nearing the end of her festival run, she agreed. A long 12 months later, Shorts International made [her short] available on iTunes” (Kander, 2013a). After agreeing to have a large company like Shorts International distribute a film, filmmakers are typically subject to whatever timeline and marketing plan that company chooses.

In addition to slow response times, contracts with iTunes via Shorts International show that they take hefty percentages of the revenues films are earning. Director Chris Jones shared the royalty report for his short “Gone Fishing” (2008),
which was released on iTunes through Shorts International, via his sales agent Network Ireland. The chart below shows where his earnings went. He kept a total of $430.48 out of $2194.97, or 19.6%. Meanwhile, iTunes takes $657.56 (30%), Network Ireland takes $184.48 (8.4%), and Shorts International takes $922.41 (42%). Apple previously had the most popular distribution platform with iTunes and refused to work exclusively with filmmakers or smaller sales agents, working only with Shorts International, which created a discreet monopoly in the short film industry and allowed them to take significant portions of the revenue the short filmmakers earn. These revenue cuts make it more difficult for filmmakers to get another project going, and the monopoly made it more difficult for short filmmakers to publicize their work (Jones, 2011). Additional platforms for short films today now solve the problem of finding a large audience, but earning revenue still remains a challenge. These servicing fees from the distributors do not help.
Being the exclusive distributor for the Oscar nominated short films also allows Shorts International to create their own terms for the nominated filmmakers. In 2013, it was publicly announced that Shorts International sent a letter to the nominated filmmakers asking them “to take down their films, citing a desire to preserve the theatrical experience” (Kander, 2013a). They wanted the filmmakers to pull their shorts off their websites, making the films unavailable to viewers. They argued that having the shorts available online would cause the box office revenue to drop, and those with films available online would have an unfair advantage for Oscar voting (Yamato, 2013). Filmmaker Carter Pilcher “argued that posting online didn’t give the nominees a leg up on the competition, because Oscar voters were provided with DVDs of the nominated films for viewing consideration” (Yamato, 2013) anyhow. Regardless, Shorts International had the rights to force the content leading to filmmakers to pull
their films from their online platforms. Filmmakers complained of having to “[choose] between allowing the widest audience possible to see their films, and getting paid for them” (Yamato, 2013). In the long run, the media attention created around this public controversy weeks before the end of voting deadlines created a larger impact around the short films than either the theatrical or online distributions ever would have (Yamato, 2013). Oddly enough, “despite the prestige a Shorts International stamp-of-approval provides, the filmmakers saw little financial upside while having to sacrifice the option to put the work online” (Gorochow, 2013).

Overall, however, short filmmakers have few complaints about Shorts International. In recent news coverage, “filmmakers were complimentary of the service, without which their films would never have hit the silver screen” (Kander, 2013a). It is a reflection of how the distribution game for short filmmakers is changing. Kander (2013a) puts it best when he claims, “older models are becoming obsolete. Perhaps those frustrations with Shorts International have less to do with the company itself, but rather that they are simply purveyors of an outdated model.” As the online market for short films continues expanding and viewing habits change, Shorts International will have to let the online limitations go, broadening the options for short film distribution.

**Online Platform Options**

When self-distributing a film online, a filmmaker has several options in terms of platforms that can stream short films. There are several websites that offer streaming services to filmmakers, but the most popular options by far are YouTube
and Vimeo. Each streaming site comes with its own reputation, benefits, downsides, and options for filmmakers (Allen, 2013b). There are practical arguments for why one is better or worse than the other, making either a viable option for distribution depending on what results and audience a filmmaker is looking for.

**Vimeo**

Vimeo has grown from a small website dedicated to collaborating with “filmmakers who wanted to share their creative work and personal moments from their lives” in 2004 to one of the most popular platforms today for distributing and viewing short form content on the web (About Vimeo, 2015). One of Vimeo’s significant strengths is its audience. In terms of who is watching, “Vimeo certainly has the smaller market while YouTube reaches over millions, but your audience is much more concentrated in people that are looking for creative films, as YouTubers are usually look for entertaining clips” (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014). It runs a much more professional website and draws an audience that is looking for short films and appreciates the quality and effort put into them. The site runs the reputation as a place for “an artist” rather than “a person that makes videos” (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014). Additionally, Vimeo focuses its site on the filmmaker’s work rather than advertisements and other possible online distractions. There are limited advertisements depending on membership level, but a majority of the screen is dedicated to the video player.

As seen below in Figure 4, the video player sits above the film’s title, uploader, rating, and description. There is an option to see more information about the short,
including notes from the filmmaker, but it can be hidden if the viewer does not want to be bothered by it. Following this are two links: one allows a member of the Vimeo community to follow the filmmaker and see more of his or her work, while the other allows a member to see stats about the film’s views and online progress. The stats, as seen in Figure 5, include a line graph charting the number of plays, likes, and comments, as well as the dates these events occurred. Below all of these are comments from viewers, and above is a bar previewing other videos to watch, which can also be hidden (George’s Boots, 2013).
Figure 3: George’s Boots on Vimeo (2013)

Figure 4: George’s Boots Statistics from Vimeo (2013)
In addition to the professional appearance of Vimeo’s platform, it also offers monetization options for filmmakers. It has launched three different applications: Vimeo TipJar, Pay-to-View and Vimeo On Demand. In 2012 Vimeo launched the Vimeo Tip Jar and Pay-to-View. Tip Jar is a service where anyone can donate or “tip” the filmmaker after watching his or her short film. The service uses PayPal and relies on viewers’ charity to help filmmakers earn a profit for sharing their work (Introducing Vimeo Tip Jar and more Creator Services, 2012). Pay-to-View, also launched in 2012, allows filmmakers to charge a fee upfront to view the short film. This turned Vimeo into more of a distribution platform for film since it requires monetary costs from a viewer to enjoy the film while earning a profit for the filmmaker.

In March 2013, Pay-to-View was converted to Vimeo On Demand. The change in service allows viewers to rent or buy the films for a period of time and price chosen by the filmmaker. The services offers the filmmakers 90% of the sales they make, and the remaining 10% goes to Vimeo as commission. Additionally, the shorts can stream on web, mobile, and television platforms (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014; Vimeo On Demand: Sell your work, your way, 2013). In the short film world, “this is the first time a platform with a thriving community has made on demand sales this simple and accessible” for direct filmmaker-to-fan distribution (Allen, 2013c). Unfortunately, the Pay-to-View model creates barriers for online viewers and gives rise to a more significant conversation about free media, which will be discussed further later. However, Vimeo is not without its faults.
Filmmakers may be able to earn back 90% of their revenue from the Vimeo On Demand service, but Vimeo is not free for all users. A Vimeo Basic account is free but limits the user benefits. For example, a Vimeo Basic user can only upload one high definition (HD) short per week and 25GB of HD per year. It has a basic speed conversion for watching films and will only receive basic statistics about the audience and viewer popularity of the short film. A middle-tier option is Vimeo Plus, which offers unlimited uploads with 250GB of HD, priority speed conversion, limited advertisements while watching films, and advanced statistics, all for a $59.99 annual fee (or $9.99/month). To get the distribution benefits out of Vimeo with Vimeo On Demand, however, as well as no advertisements and all other benefits of Vimeo Plus, a filmmaker must pay $199 annually (Join the high-quality home for ad-free HD videos, 2015). Indeed, this is no small fee for a struggling new filmmaker looking for monetary compensation for his or her work.

Along with the fees to use Vimeo, being discovered or noticed on the site is not always easy. The searching tools on Vimeo still require some work: “If an external link does not bring you to your video page, there is hardly any chance of people seeing your video” (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014). Some viewers struggle to find a short film they are looking for even if they search for the exact title of the film on Vimeo. Unless a video is featured on the site’s homepage, recommended to a viewer based on viewing history, or listed as a Vimeo Staff Pick, it is unlikely that it will be watched by anyone other than the filmmaker’s family and friends. Vimeo may come with a
more professional reputation and a film enthusiast community, but if the short never gets seen, the effort and fees may be worthless (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014).

**YouTube**

Contrasting Vimeo is the go-to video site for most people: YouTube. YouTube offers a very different look for videos as seen below in Figure 6. Advertisements precede the films, and a bar to the right of the video player lists dozens of other related videos a viewer may be interested in. The video player is also pointedly smaller compared to Vimeo’s, making it more likely for a viewer to be distracted and click away to another film. It has a comparably less emphasis on video quality and size compared to Vimeo (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014).
YouTube also comes with a significantly different reputation. As one short filmmaker puts it, “to the world, YouTube is still the place to watch keyboard cats and blenders” (Allen, 2011b), not necessarily quality short films. The site attracts a very different audience compared to Vimeo. However, uploading videos to YouTube is completely free. In fact, if a user gains enough subscribers to their channel, YouTube will pay that person for bringing more traffic to the site. As mentioned, “YouTube offers monetization by placing ads on your videos, which can generate a few bucks if
you get thousands of views” (YouTube or Vimeo, 2014), but getting thousands of views is much more likely through this service than Vimeo.

Although it can be argued that the advertisements take away some value and quality related to the film, the free service and broad audience may be worth the cost. After a simple Google search for “Fresh Guacamole,” PES’s 2012 Oscar nominated Animated Short, the link to the film on YouTube is the first item listed. The links that follow are either recipes for guacamole, a link to the film’s Internet Movie Database (IMDB) page, and the filmmaker’s personal website. A link to the film’s viewing page on Vimeo is not listed.

In today’s technology-driven world, “It’s no longer unusual when an explosive YouTube video leads directly to a Hollywood-sized deal” (Gorochow, 2013). There are thousands of users now working to gain viewers for their videos and make a name for themselves, which still means heavy competition for anyone uploading videos to the site. Because of the audience and casualness of the platform, however, users are much more likely to jump from video to video or find a film on YouTube from a social media site (Allen, 2011b). Regardless, the audience a filmmaker earns on YouTube may not be what he or she is looking for. In other words, it may be easy to have thousands of views, but they may not be the right views. To a Hollywood studio, however, a short that is popular on YouTube and generating buzz means a safer risk as a feature film.
Film Festival Circuit versus Online Distribution

Regardless of which online platform a filmmaker chooses, short filmmakers Andrew Allen and Jason Sondhi prove that online distribution today goes further than the festival circuit. After eight months screening at film festivals, the duo created a marketing plan to release their animated short “The Thomas Beale Cipher” (2011) online and then compared the results. They chose to release the short on Vimeo to attract a viewership with a stronger film background. Their plan was to post the film early in the morning on a Monday to maintain relevancy throughout the week, advertise the film’s link through social media, and contact major bloggers and online publications about the release. Their film gathered 170,000 views on Vimeo and over 1300 mentions in blogs and other media, the link was shared on Facebook over 5000 times and gained over 500 fans on the Facebook page, and the short was Tweeted about 2000 times. This happened within the first two weeks of posting the short online (Allen, 2011a).

In addition to social media sharing and views, the distribution on Vimeo was free, compared to the $1200 they spent on film festival fees previously. Online marketing also captured the interest of industry professionals and distributors, compared to no interest on the festival circuit where they had only 3000 views. They also had filmmakers contacting them about collaborating on future work (Allen, 2011a). For a visual display of this information, as well as more detailed information on their media calendar and viewing statistics, refer to Appendix D.
This case study proves that although the online distribution market is still growing and being discovered, the film industry is paying attention to short films posted online. It is a new media through which films are being discovered, and with the oversaturation of small film festivals, the expanse of the online world is proving more valuable. Moreover, the developments in monetization opportunities for filmmakers are slowly making online viewing of short films a potentially profitable market. Although posting shorts online has its pros and cons, the benefits of online release overall are proving to outdo the standard festival model for reaching an online audience (Allen, 2011a).

The Downside to Online Distribution

The online world of the short film industry is without a doubt expanding, but this comes with several downsides and areas of the market that are still being figured out. To begin, there are millions of videos online, ranging from music videos, web series, trailers and clips, to home movies. Additionally, most videos are released on the web for free. Charging for a work is an easy way for a filmmaker to earn a profit for his or her film, but it also loses viewers who are unwilling to pay for online media. The free media model is the pillar on which the Internet has expanded, but unfortunately social media likes do not equal profit. Along with these downsides comes a loss of control and ownership for filmmakers. Videos released online are easy to steal and allow the viewers to be in control of how they view the film. Finally, the experience of watching content online is very different from watching a film in theatres. Filmmakers are still adjusting to this new on-the-go medium that displays
their work on a two-inch screen and plays audio out of iPhone speakers. It is not only
a new tool for distribution, but the Internet is also an entirely new way to watch films
that filmmakers are still learning how to produce for.

**Oversaturation of Online Content**

One of the biggest problems jumping out at filmmakers looking to distribute
online is where to start. There are hundreds of websites that offer streaming platforms
and it is easy lose a film amongst the overwhelming surplus of content. As filmmaker
Jordan Bayne (2014) recognizes, “The internet (sic), Facebook, and inboxes are
overflowing with content: a deluge that makes it difficult for even the most diligent to
have time to sift thru and determine what is good from what is crap.” Even regarding
common strategies like crowdfunding, when a film has yet to even be made, there is
an overflow. Bradley (2015) recalls, “every day I get like three requests for money and
I don’t pay. I don’t give anybody anything anymore” (personal communication,
February 4, 2015).

The oversaturation has led to a point where, to get recognition, a film can no
longer be just good; it has to be great. Allen (2012) writes an entire article dedicated to
this topic, explaining that only incredibly substantial, experimental, or innovative short
films find voices online. In regards to short films he claims, “Good follows all the
right rules. And that’s exactly why it’s not great” (2012). Bayne’s film “The Sea is All
I Know” struggled to gain media attention: “Even a critically acclaimed short film in
Oscar consideration starring an Academy Award winning actress has a hard time
finding attention in this rapidly changing, oversaturated, consumer society.” (Bayne,
Her film starred Melissa Leo, who won the 2010 Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *The Fighter* (2010), and the short was considered for an Oscar nomination in 2011 (The Fighter – Awards, 2015; Bayne, 2014). In the online world, however, success was not immediate or guaranteed. Her live action short is a character drama that runs 29 minutes, which is a long watch for an online viewer. When it comes to online content, “viewers are more interested in convenience than quality” (A. Allen, 2013b). An audience member watching a film from his or her computer at home is most likely not interested in how well a video is produced, but rather how quickly and easily it can be watched. The Internet has introduced a new, impatient viewer of streaming media, causing the ease of viewing to frequently surpass the film’s artistic worth (Allen, 2013b; Gorochow, 2013).

**Demand for Free Media**

As discussed previously, one of Vimeo’s draws and innovations for online distribution is Vimeo On Demand, a service that allows filmmakers to post their short films so viewers can pay a fee to rent or buy the film for a price and time length set by the filmmaker. It is one of the first services of its kind that has begun to generate a business model for self-distributing and earning a profit for short form content. In a marketplace filled with free media at a person’s fingertips, though, the success of Vimeo On Demand and similar services is questionable.

Back in 2005, the film community was already debating the issue of giving away films for free:

According to Rick Prelinger, founder of the Prelinger Archive and director of the all-public-domain compilation film, Panorama Ephemera, a key factor is
the generational shift toward younger, more tech-savvy consumers who have grown up as part of a remix culture. “Younger people are not as interested in collecting physical objects,” says Prelinger. “For them, distinctions between reader and writer and viewer have broken down. And the suits in the entertainment industry have no idea how to deal with it. We’re entering an era of ubiquitous media that the industries haven’t yet figured out how to handle. The one thing that should be obvious is that it’s not going to work if you have to pay a quarter for everything you see or hear.” (Anderson)

Today, this is remaining a problem still. Charging a fee for watching films creates a barrier between the viewer and the film. Even in theaters some feel that ticket prices are too high and soon people will no longer be willing to pay box office prices (Ebert, 2011; Anderson, 2005), especially as online streaming services gain more popular and relevant content. Bayne (2014) recognizes the market as being “so used to free content that to pay .99 on iTunes turns audiences away.” This problem, however, has stemmed from fact that audiences have never truly had to pay for short form content once it was no longer shown regularly in theaters (Gorochow, 2013).

Brewster Kahle, founder of the Internet Archive, urges for filmmakers to earn some sort of monetary compensation for their contribution to today’s culture. He states: “in this country it shouldn’t cost you to give things away. In every other form of charitable giving, you get tax benefits or deductions – except on the Net. If you put a video online and it gets really popular, you could lose your house” (Anderson, 2005). This idea of compensation is regularly preached, but the public continues to ignore the prospect of owing filmmakers for the entertainment they produce.

Filmmakers who have short films that went viral share a similar opinion to Kahle: “Feelings and virtual accolades are one thing, monetary compensation and career opportunities are another. As shrewd as it sounds, enthusiastic fandom and
internet (sic) exclamations are essentially, when it comes down to it, somewhat meaningless” (Kander, 2012). They do not provide a filmmaker with any type of profit to either continue creating content or pay the bills. Short filmmaker Tom Jenkins calls these “online accolades . . . a definite ego boost: a warm fuzzy feeling built on a foundation of clicks and comments” (Kander, 2012). Online popularity might lead to an industry connection or distribution nowadays, and if not, it at least offers a filmmaker confidence in his or her creative abilities. In terms of an economically reasonable profit, though, those watching short films online are not yet willing to pay for them, and for now they do not have to. If or until charging for online entertainment becomes a more culturally acceptable idea, viewers most likely will not pay for online content.

**Losing Control**

Online content is an entirely new form of media, not only in the distribution world, but also for filmmakers and audiences alike. As streaming sites like Netflix and Hulu have become mainstream ways to watch movies and television, filmmakers are learning to adjust to what that means for the filmmaking process. The theatrical experience is one of the highlights of traditional cinema and what several art enthusiasts preach as one of film’s main purposes. Bradley reflected on a festival screening a few years ago by sharing this memory of what the theatre offers:

> There were lots of black kids there, there were like sports people who had never been to the theater, film buffs, everybody's there. And at the end of the movie, it's like really great and Mohammad Ali is like standing in this like roadway just doing a palm and everybody is crying. Everybody’s crying. And I walk in the back of the theater and it was like this great feeling that everyone was on the same page for once. Everybody. Whether you were an eighteen-
year-old sports administration kid or a seventy-year-old townie everyone was there in the same room watching the same thing and getting it together. And then they spilled into the lobby and you could just feel that like 'oh wow' people really shared something together that meant something. I don't know if you get that on the Internet. (personal communication, February 4, 2015)

This communal experience Bradley describes is lost in viewing films from home or on a smaller computer or phone screen. In the changing forms of media and distribution, the emotional journey often taken with films is shrunk down to whatever is the most convenient manner for the viewer at that time. Brody (2014b) also discusses how different viewing platforms change the interpretation and experience of a film entirely. He recalls watching a restoration of Shirley Clarke’s documentary *Portrait of Jason* (1967) through a DVD on his computer and enjoying it very much. He went to see the restoration in theatres the next week and still enjoyed it; however, he had a very different interpretation of the film:

. . . the emotional tenor of the experience had changed. Watching it at home, the voice of the movie’s subject—who speaks on camera throughout—dominated, and its theatrical, self-dramatizing exuberance made the strongest impression on me. In the theatre, Jason’s face, seen often in closeup, reveals much that his voice doesn’t. Had I reviewed the film on the basis of that screening rather than from home, I think I’d have placed greater emphasis on the pain. It made me wonder how screenings might have shifted my responses to many other movies that I watched by way of DVD or online links. (2014b)

As the way people view films changes, filmmakers need to learn about and adapt to what these changes mean for film. It is true that “there’s something special about the experience of seeing a movie in a theatre. The habit of watching on our televisions and our computers feeds the hunger for access to movies, and, for movies
that are unavailable otherwise, it’s a godsend. But size does matter” (Brody, 2014b).

For a short film today, unless it is picked up on the festival circuit or being distributed by Shorts International, it is unlikely that it will be shown on the big screen. If a short is not shown in a theatre, the filmmaker loses a significant amount of awareness on how his or her film is viewed.

Theaters have almost complete regulation over how films on the big screen are viewed that filmmakers are aware of when making a film. For a viewer, the theatre controls the time, location, temperature, darkness level, volume, video quality, angle and comfort of the chair, and even what snacks and drinks can be served. However, “online films can be watched just about anywhere, on the bus, in the bathtub, at work. You, the filmmaker, have little control over when or how your story is viewed” (Allen, 2013b). The online world is showing that films watched online need to follow a different set of rules in order to be successful.

For one, screen size and pacing go hand in hand. The smaller the screen, the faster the story needs to move. People are more impatient on smaller screens, as Allen (2013b) writes: “I can’t tell you how many online films I’ve seen with beautiful cinematography, great premise, great acting, great everything all ruined by a slow, 20-minute storyline that goes nowhere.” Additionally, there are different measures of quality on a computer. For example, volume is measured in pre-set, limiting levels that are different depending on the type of computer, and video files are compressed, leaving noise on the screen’s interface. Online films also tell a different type of story than those that typically excite festivalgoers. The online world has a different audience
with different expectations and standards of quality. Viewers watching from a phone or laptop typically stop watching after the first 60 seconds (Allen, 2013b). They also have the ability to start, stop, and skip ahead throughout the storyline and depending on what service they use to watch, commercials may interrupt. Finally, if a film is going to be playing online, its plot cannot hinge on small objects or props because the item may not even be distinguishable on the screen when the viewer sees it.

Making a film is difficult enough, but if a filmmaker is making a short that will most likely be distributed online, these are important factors to consider. They limit what can be done in what is referred to as one of the more experimental expressions of film (Canciani, 2014; Bradley, personal communication, February 4, 2015). Films online are also competing against the entire World Wide Web for a viewer’s attention. They have to have more than just an opening hook. Independent producer Ted Hope explains:

> When I make my new film, I’m not just competing against Poultrygeist. I’m not just competing against the new Mel Gibson movie. I’m competing against the whole history of cinema. You sit here in your home and say, “Well, next on my Netflix queue I have this Kurosawa film, this Fritz Lang film, the fourth season of South Park, and I have Slither by James Gunn.” I have all these things I want to watch. I’m competing against the history of cinema. So why are you going to watch my movie tonight instead of those? I need to give you the access. I have to give you the ramp trail to get you to the wheel and make you content to keep running around. (Kaufman, 2011)

The online marketplace for film is constantly expanding and slowly discovering the boundaries for what does and does not work for the short format. It is creating a new means of distributing, possible options for generating revenue, and easy options for filmmakers breaking into the industry. It still poses a few new problems for
filmmakers, however, such as competing with the overwhelming amount of media content, giving away artwork for free, and not being able to make a living as a short filmmaker. It also poses problems for physically smaller viewing platforms and a lack of control over how, where, and when a film is viewed, creating a different interpretation and meaning of a story for the viewer. Filmmakers are still learning to adapt to these new standards to create work that is impactful and viewable in the developing online distribution world.
Conclusion and Recommendations

Short films may still remain a generally unprofitable medium within the film industry, but technology is gradually helping change this standard. For various reasons including gaining experience, funding a feature, and escaping Hollywood pressures, filmmakers create short films regardless of the little to no profit they usually earn. Even short films that earn distribution deals and are sold to popular platforms have trouble making revenue: most of the funds go to the distribution companies and service companies that made the deal possible, as seen with the Jones’ short “Gone Fishing” (2008) released on iTunes where he profited only 20% of the total earnings (Jones, 2011). As film festivals continue to become an oversaturated market and online platforms are becoming the norm, innovative revenue models are being tested and short filmmakers are beginning to carve new paths in the industry. Zero of the top ten highest grossing films in 2011 had stories that were not a sequel or book adaptation, opposed to seven in 1981 (Allen, 2012b). Additionally, the popular film festival website Withoutabox.com provides over 5000 film festivals for filmmakers to submit to (FAQ, 2015). Although film festivals get a short film in front of a live audience, online platforms expose films to a broader audience and offer easier access to these shorts. The goal should, after all, be to share the art with as many people as possible (Christopher, personal communication, February 24, 2015). The short film industry is making headways, becoming the new medium for filmmakers to experiment with and grow from through original content that they can easily and freely share with the public.
For future research within the short film industry, more data on the effects of crowdfunding needs to be examined. Crowdfunding is becoming an extremely popular way for budding filmmakers to raise funds for projects and gain momentum for their films; however, with regards to short films there is little to no information available. Future studies also should examine how the data analytics offered on online platforms assist filmmakers with marketing. Learning if and how filmmakers utilize these resources in the ever-changing online landscape would benefit those looking to self-market or distribute films, as well as the marketing field as a whole.

Overall, short films are a rarely watched, rarely studied art form that continues to produce some of the most innovative and experimental forms of media. As the online world develops viewing platforms and new sources of revenue for these short filmmakers and the traditional festival model works through its current limitations, short filmmakers must learn what the best route for their filmmaking goals are. Hundreds of paths and options are available now, allowing this media to be more accessible to an audience than ever before.
References


Appendix A

Chart 2: Interest groups and their importance at film festivals

Peranson’s (2008) breakdown of the various interest groups at film festivals and their importance to the festival on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important. Each group has a weighted interest in a festival, which influences the types of films that screen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTEREST GROUP</th>
<th>BUSINESS FESTIVAL</th>
<th>AUDIENCE FESTIVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributor/Buyer</td>
<td>1. Domestically, use as launching pad for soon-to-be-released films, take advantage of festival/presence of talent to hold press junkets; buyers attend festivals looking to acquire new films (leading to the need for a premiere-heavy lineup)</td>
<td>4. If distributor believes in good word of mouth creating audience, use to launch newer releases; buyer may attend to acquire in specialty areas (i.e. if festival is strong in documentaries, particular national cinemas ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales agent</td>
<td>2. A place to promote and sell films to distributors</td>
<td>5. Used as a revenue stream to fund their presence at business festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsors</td>
<td>3. Need to be appeased, often with presence of celebrities</td>
<td>2. Need to be appeased, with ‘sponsor films’, more commercial films with stars or audience friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>4. Promotion of national cinema</td>
<td>3. Promotion of national cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>5. Lesser concern, belief is they will see anything that has been branded by the festival and not complain</td>
<td>1. Major concern, but also underlying truth that tastes often vary from programmer to general public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critics</td>
<td>6. Junkets for mainstream critics, ‘artier’ films for special press</td>
<td>6. Need to concern themselves with local critics’ reactions as they are promotional tools for selling tickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmmakers</td>
<td>7. Attend because of work, a chore, do major publicity</td>
<td>7. Not as much work (more like vacation), engage with audience, meet other filmmakers. Often younger filmmakers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

The following chart gathers the submission fees for some of the world’s top Business Festivals as of 2015. The fees reported are specifically for Short Films. For the Tribeca Film Festival, the submission fee is $35 for a Narrative Short and $40 for a Short Documentary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Early Submission</th>
<th>Regular Submission</th>
<th>Late Submission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sundance Film Festival</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td>$80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South by Southwest</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$40</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribeca Film Festival</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>$35-40</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Submitting to the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, 2015)

(Submit Your Film!, 2015)

(Film Submissions: Frequently Asked Questions | Tribeca, 2015)
Appendix C

Hollywood’s Waning Creativity

**HOLLYWOOD’S WANING CREATIVITY**

*Short of the Week.com*

### Top 10 Films (US Gross)

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK</td>
<td>TERMINATOR 2</td>
<td>HARRY POTTER</td>
<td>HARRY POTTER 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ON GOLDEN POND</td>
<td>ROBIN HOOD</td>
<td>LOTR: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING</td>
<td>TRANSFORMERS 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUPERMAN II</td>
<td>BEAUTY AND THE BEAST</td>
<td>SHREK</td>
<td>THE TWILIGHT SAGA 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARTHUR</td>
<td>THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS</td>
<td>MONSTERS, INC.</td>
<td>THE HANGOVER PART 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STRIPES</td>
<td>CITY SLICKERS</td>
<td>RUSH HOUR 2</td>
<td>PIRATES OF CARIBBEAN 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE CANNONBALL RUN</td>
<td>HOOK</td>
<td>THE MUMMY RETURNS</td>
<td>FAST FIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHARIOTS OF FIRE</td>
<td>THE ADDAMS FAMILY</td>
<td>OCEAN’S ELEVEN</td>
<td>CARS 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOR YOUR EYES ONLY</td>
<td>SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY</td>
<td>PEARL HARBOR</td>
<td>THOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE FOUR SEASONS</td>
<td>FATHER OF THE BRIDE</td>
<td>JURASSIC PARK III</td>
<td>RISE: PLANET OF THE APES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TIME BANDITS</td>
<td>THE NAKED GUN 2 1/2</td>
<td>PLANET OF THE APES</td>
<td>CAPTAIN AMERICA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Originals | Adaptations | Sequels

| Original Films in 1981 | 7 | | |
| Original Films in 2011 | 0 | | |
THE SHORT FILM INDUSTRY AND ONLINE DISTRIBUTION

THE ONLY ORIGINAL STORY IN THE TOP 15 FILMS IN 2011

#14 BRIDESMAIDS

FRANCHISES FROM 2001 WERE STILL SUPPORTING 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 HARRY POTTER 1</td>
<td>#1 HARRY POTTER 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 PLANET APES</td>
<td>#9 RISE PLANET APES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14 THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS</td>
<td>#6 FAST FIVE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stats from BoxOfficeMojo.com
Appendix D

Festival Run versus Online Distribution of The Thomas Beale Cipher

The following graphics are visual displays of the information described in the subsection Film Festival Circuit versus Online Distribution. Along with a side-by-side comparison of results, a timeline is also included. The timeline illustrates the popularity of the online release with the corresponding blog posts and magazine articles published about the short film.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3K Number of views</td>
<td>170K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Media Impressions</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1200 Cost</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no Industry Interest</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no Distributor Interest</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Graph showing timeline and popularity]