

**Michael Curtin, Jennifer Holt, and Kevin Sanson (eds.):**  
***Distribution Revolution: Conversations about***  
***the Digital Future of Film and Television.***  
**Oakland, California: University of California Press. 2014.**

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*Distribution Revolution* is a collection of interviews with seventeen prominent media personalities. The book attempts to give various perspectives on the digital present and future of film – and challenges with regards to production, circulation and consumption of media contents. The book is made of 17 chapters, broken down into three broad sections. The first, “Studios”, consists of five chapters focusing on interviews with top studio executives from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, The Walt Disney Company, Sony Pictures, and Warner Bros. The second section, “Upstart”, consists of six chapters focusing on interviews with top executives/founders of major distribution companies. The third section, “Creatives” focuses on screenwriters, directors, producers amongst others.

The introduction penned by the editors is about the changing conditions in the industry. The film industry has changed over time and distribution companies have now become original content providers, with Netflix as an example. The editors make a case for the fact that the biggest industry change has occurred in the distribution networks and technologies – distribution companies no longer have full control over the reach and distribution of its content, as the internet has made it quite impossible. This is an issue because this has been the main component of the financial success of Hollywood. To ensure that they remain profitable, it is therefore pertinent for content providers to understand these changes and seek ways to engage with digital distribution companies like Hulu, Netflix, Amazon and Apple. The introductory section ends with a brief but well written explanation of each section in the book, summarising the major arguments of

each section. The editors also give a brief introduction at the beginning of each section, identifying the key topics and some of the major statements made by the interviewees that nicely summarises the section.

Considering the fact that this is a collection of interviews, therefore limiting the role of the editors in shaping the direction or even language of the book, it would be difficult to find any major issues with the book, without accusing the editors of something they had little control over. Leaving that as it may, Curtin, Hold and Sanson conducted the interviews in a manner that allowed for diverse thoughts on the subject matter, by assembling a diverse and very relevant lists of interviewees. The book is relevant and timely in the sense that it allows scholars access to some of the greatest minds in film and movie production today. It is a refreshing perspective on new media and its effect on content production and distribution. The readers are mostly left with the job of forming their conclusions based on the interviews. Researchers can use this no-holds-barred collection of interviews where access to individuals like this might be difficult. Academics, students and researchers in Africa and other parts of the world with practically no hope of reaching out to Hollywood movers and shakers might find the book useful in the course of trying to find relevant and timely materials on the challenges facing the movie industry today with regards to new media.

The “Studio” section of the book includes an admirable collection of interviews with Hollywood ‘big wigs’ from companies such as 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, The Walt Disney Company, and more. They talk about the problems studios are facing with distribution, such as piracy, and measures they have put in place to combat piracy and bootlegging. The interviewees mostly agree that they need to find ways of using digital media to engage and retain their target bases by ensuring that they take into consideration the new ways consumers now interact with contents. The internet has brought lot of challenges for studios. Digital platform innovations have resulted in concerns about new piracy and online available unlicensed materials, which have lead to a devaluation of digital contents. Mitch Singer, the Chief digital strategy officer at Sony Pictures, views these innovations as more of an opportunity than a threat. To combat the issues brought about by digitalization of studio content processes, studio executives have been forced to constantly re-evaluate their strategies. Despite having sometimes conflicting views on the issue discussed, the interviewees in this section generally agree that digital distribution is very complex and can be very instrumental to the survival of the industry if properly implemented and managed.

The “Upstarts” section, as the name implies, interviews executives of relatively new media companies. The editors interviewed are from e.g. BermanBraun, Generate, Evil Angel Productions, and Netflix. The interviewees contribute immensely to the discussion on producing and distribution of content across digital channels. The discussions in this section invariably lead to questions about the relevance of cable channels and broadcasting especially in light of the fact that content is increasingly becoming available anytime,

and on any device. The interviewees shed some light on how streaming and other internet based content delivery systems are changing the industry and how audiences access entertainment content. One interviewee explains that this new reality is disruptive as networks are losing their grip and control on contents. He explains that audiences are now more concerned about the content than the media house that produces it. In light of these changes it has become imperative for media houses and content creators to connect with audiences on a personal level. Digital distributors also need to identify ways of engaging viewers. Another interviewee explains that the growth and popularity of 'tube sites' have affected the revenue stream in the adult industry and as such it has become important to adapt the same business models as these sites in order to remain competitive.

The "Creatives" section focuses on discussions on the changes experienced by creative talents at all levels. This section includes interviews with writers, producers and directors in the entertainment industry. The interviews in this section help illustrate the connections between media industries and clearly show how changes in distribution have affected how content is produced. Particular attention was paid to the conflicts in 2007 that shut down the Los Angeles entertainment industry for about three months. The conflict culminated in a strike and was largely centred on the compensation rates for the reuse of television content and film across digital platforms. According to the interviews, residual royalties have accounted for about 25 pct. of total income for writers, and with the growth of digital distribution, the directors, writers, producers etc. want to ensure that they will still get some royalties from new digital distribution networks. Another concern in this sector is the fact that networks now demand more from writers; they want them to not only write compelling stories, but now also to focus on films with potential for sequels that can be replicated across media platforms. Writers and directors are now more active in promoting entertainment content, and are expected to develop web content, social media buzz and product placements. This also applies to other creative personnel in the industry. One of the major problems posed by digital distribution of content is the fact that a lot of television shows struggle for attention as audiences have access to a lot of contents now and as such cannot maintain the same level of attention and interest for a long time before drifting to the next show.

The book concludes with an Appendix section which lets readers know the period the interviews were conducted and as such might help appreciate the changes that have occurred since then. The appendix also includes a glossary explaining the meaning of some of the difficult-to-understand-words or professional jargon used in the book.

In a nutshell, *Distribution Revolution* gives a clear but not easily accessed insight into the ways digital media/technology is changing the industry. It will be useful resource for students, researchers and lecturers in the field of media and communication.

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