



Why film professionals should have more faith in the younger generation

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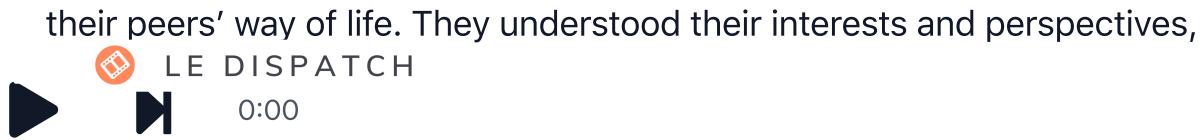


Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* set the standard for all summer blockbusters that followed. As we celebrate the 47th anniversary of its release (June 20th 1975), here is why and how it should be held up as an example. As soon as the film opens, 26 yo Steven Spielberg addresses his generation, his peers.

'EXT. BEACH , NIGHT

Around a blazing bonfire, a group of young men and women, beer cans (or maybe a keg) in evidence, as well as the bota Spanish leather wine-bag much in favor by beach and ski-bum types. The group is swapping sentimental alma maters, weepily singing eastern Ivy League anthems -, Dartmouth, Cornell, Harvard, Penn, etc.'

If during the 50s, movie theaters in the USA had an audience of 20.6 million, by the time *Jaws* was released in 1975, American ticket sales figures struggled to reach 4.6 million. Hollywood majors (Paramount, Universal, MGM, Fox) faced an unprecedented crisis. To prevent bankruptcy, the studios needed to find a way to bring the audience back to the theaters at all costs. In doing so, they created opportunities for a fresh generation of creators to enter the game. New directors such as Coppola, Lucas, Scorsese and Spielberg, had a better understanding of



their peers' way of life. They understood their interests and perspectives,

as a game changer for the entire industry.

With *Jaws*, for instance, addressing a new audience fostered innovative distribution and marketing strategies. The North American broad distribution pattern of *Jaws* (464 screens) broke the summer distribution trend. Studios were convinced people did not go to movie theaters during the summer months, and therefore opted to "flush" their "junk" movies during that period. They also followed a typical release strategy of opening at a few big-city theaters, then slowly forwarding prints to additional locales across the country, capitalizing on any positive critical or audience response. Of course, marketing costs were to be absorbed at a more favorable rate per print with the new pattern of national release which explains why Universal Studios' president, Sid Sheinberg, agreed to pair it with a national television marketing campaign. Another first. Today, bringing a new generation of audience back to the theaters seems to be yet again a great challenge for us, film industry professionals. Fortunately, there is much we can learn from the past to face this new future. Back in the 70s, senior studio executives were reluctant to leave their seats to Spielberg and his likes, a type of resistance and conservatism that isn't so far off from the contemporary reception of the industry to the digital content creators. Lukewarm at best.

Deloitte's 2022, 16th annual "Digital Media Trends", highlights that audiences have savvier behaviors toward contents - especially younger generations who grew up with smartphones, social media and video games - and consider user-generated social media streams to be better meeting their needs. In the U.S., 81% of social media users say they use social media services at least daily; 59% use these services several times a day. In addition, 70% of U.S. survey participants say they follow an influencer, and one-third (33%) say these online personalities influence their purchase decisions. This figure jumps up to more than half of the American Gen Zs (52%) and Millennials (53%). Instagram is a central communication stream for all types of companies. They invest widely to attract its billion monthly users. Influence Marketing is expected to grow to be worth \$16.4 Billion this year (Source Marketing Benchmark Report by Influencer Marketing Hub).

An interesting cross-brand trend appeared between streaming and social media in 2021. Netflix became the most followed brand on TikTok, while Disney nestled in the top 10. When young adults (19-27) weren't watching videos on the platform they were creating videos and discussing their streaming on social media. Content creation seems very much alive. In-theater releases should grab the bull by the horns and take advantage of social media power and exposure. As film professionals we should embrace the trend and use it in our favor, instead of placing ourselves on two irreconcilable sides. The 2022 Cannes Film Festival's

large partnership with TikTok shows that there is more to digital content than “just



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...that contribute to enhancing the mindset towards cinema. The close proximity between influencers and their followers creates marketing opportunities that should not be ignored.

However, ‘influence marketing’ faces its own struggles one of which being the decreasing engagement rate - number of ‘likes’ compared to the number of ‘followers’- especially regarding medium to large accounts. The public seems to no longer take the opinion and reviews of big influencers at face value. There is one category of influencers though that seems to remain relatively steadfast: the nano influencers (1K to 5K followers). Their engagement rate is 2 to 3 times higher than that of the mega influencers (over 500K). They have a stronger connection to their community, and it shows in their engagement activity. Involving nano influencers seems to be a promising strategy for exhibitors to bring young audiences back in-theater. Creating special rates for nano influencers in exchange for posts could help build a local community around a theater. As CEO, I had the opportunity to experience this concept firsthand through “Les Séances du Turfu” at Commune Image.

Since 2010, we have been supporting the reach of all talents from the audiovisual media and film industry. As a social company, our goal is to bring support to creators by making their projects come to life thanks to an open human network and solid technical resources. We have supported over 600 films, 450 entrepreneurs of the film industry generating 150 jobs in 30 different trades. It is a place of life, open to its territory (North of Paris) and whose actions are not limited to established professionals. One of our objectives is to simplify access to culture and to encourage careers in the audiovisual sector. In order to reach young audiences post-pandemic, we created the “Séances du Turfu”. It is a program of exclusive audiovisual events for our group of nano influencers coming from our area (Seine-Saint-Denis district) who have been carefully chosen and who committed to share their experience on social media after the event. Since April 2022, the community has grown by 300%, the number of posts about a given event is 200% higher than it traditionally was without the nano influencers’ component (6 to 7 stories instead of 3). Finally, the engagement of the nano influencers has created an unprecedented group dynamic.

Even if these observations only come from a small-scale experience, we cannot ignore the potential to reshape the industry that is laid out in front of us. In 1975, with a 260 million dollars national B.O., 210 million internationally and three Oscars, the *Jaws* underdog became the most successful movie in Hollywood’s history only to be replaced by *Star Wars* two years later. We followed the lead of the younger generation then; shouldn’t we be opened to do it again?

By Caroline Safir, CEO of Commune Image I Fabrique de cinéma, in



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