

Digital Delivery for Optimal Impact: Improving our Impact on Young Audiences and European Cinema

Interview with Alicia McGivern, Irish Film Institute (Dublin, Ireland)

by Birgit Heidsiek



IFI screening Las Ninas
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Small films, big impact.

The Irish Film Institute (IFI) is raising the School's Touring Program to a new level by providing digital distribution that allows individual venues throughout Ireland to have greater flexibility in programming small French, German, and Spanish language films. Alicia McGivern, Senior Education Officer at the IFI, shares her insights on the activities of their Collaborate to Innovate project, "Digital Delivery for Optimal Impact: Improving our Impact on Young Audiences and European Cinema".

What approach is the School's Touring Program taking?

This program has been in existence for twenty years. The film tours can include as many as twenty-five venues around the country. Our aim is to bring mostly European films to venues all across the Republic of Ireland, for students to attend. Our guiding principle is to provide access to students who have no opportunity to see such films in their cities, to support teachers and students in their teaching and their study of European languages. The films we send on tour support their studies in German, French, and Spanish, as well as other languages occasionally, including Irish language. We also want to create an awareness of European cinema.

When was the School's Touring Program established?

This programme has run for twenty years. On our 20th anniversary, we're touring the German film *Run Lola, Run*, which is an exception to the rule, because we choose, for the most part, new films that either do not have a theatrical release or are unavailable outside of Dublin. We negotiate a deal with the distributor and provide a teaching guide with suggested classroom activities. The local venues, mostly art centres, promote the screenings to local audiences and schools.

How many venues are there in your network?

The film tours can include as many as 25 venues around the country. These venues communicate with local schools to determine what kind of films teachers want.

What impact does digital delivery have on the programme?

Some of our partners still rely on physical hard drives, DVD or Blu-ray. For our project, we chose venues that have already upgraded their facilities to handle digital film files, which we provide via cloud storage. This gives the venue more flexibility to programme the film and retain the file on their server for future screenings. As the screenings no longer have to fit into a touring schedule, the venues have complete scheduling freedom.

What are the biggest advantages that the School's Touring Program offers?

First, there are no delivery delays because we rely less on courier or post. Physical delivery made it impossible to provide 25 different venues with one film in a two-week timespan. Now, we make the digital file available on their server.



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With the support of CTI, the IFI has increased capacity for file storage. With our busy cinema schedule, four or five departments can be simultaneously downloading off the server for festivals, cinemas, and other events. In the past, films had to be deleted all the time but the system upgrade enables us to have greater capacity where we can store files and send them to venues as necessary.

How is the School's Touring Program financed?

We are supported by the Arts Council of Ireland to deliver an education programme nationally. However, we have to negotiate fees with film agents or distributors for a large number of screenings for the venues. The venues pay us a fee to contribute to the overall screening costs which can be, for example, a few thousand euros to license a film for a year, so we have to

offset those costs by charging the venues per screening and for KDMs. Under our project, we have waived the fees to venues, and they can schedule screenings whenever it suits their teachers and local schools, which helps build audiences in the long run.

How many students see European films through the School's Touring Program?

There are approximately 700 secondary schools in Ireland but not all students have the opportunity to go to the cinema. A typical French film on tour reaches 5,000–6,000 students; Spanish films attract 3,000–4,000 viewers. This year, there's an increased appetite for German films. The School's Touring Program is driven by the number of venues it can reach as opposed to the number of students because it is the venue that communicates with the audience.

What impact does the project have on European cinema?

The project brings European films not available anywhere else to young people throughout Ireland. Students learn a language at different speeds, fluencies, and proficiencies, which all depend on several factors. We want to get them into the cinema and let them experience and enjoy the languages they're studying through film. You hear the language, you see the country, and you get a sense of the lives these characters lead. It's not just an exercise in language arts; it's also exposure to the entire culture.

Partner cinemas:

Irish Film Institute, Dublin
(Coordinator)

Cinemax Bantry, Cork

Riverbank Arts, Kildare

Garter Lane Arts, Waterford