



A response to our Live to Digital research

Arts Council England, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre (SOLT)

Digital technologies are disrupting established practices and creating new opportunities for innovation across the creative economy.

Over the last few years a number of studies have explored this statement. From Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby's 2010¹ research, the Digital Culture survey from Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and NESTA, and research commissioned by Arts Council England in collaboration with the British Film Institute (BFI). It is clear that organisations are using technologies to reach new audiences, generate new revenue streams, and generate entirely new forms of creative work. However, the research has also highlighted many knowledge gaps in relation to digital audience experiences and digital production and distribution.

We know that the UK is now a global leader in event cinema. It has 35 active distributors of content and has formed the only trade body for the industry, the Event Cinema Association. In 2014 event cinema was worth over £35 million in the UK and Ireland and accounted for over 3% of total box office sales.

As well as big players such as National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, there is also evidence of small-scale organisations being able to enter this market. But although event cinema is an attractive business prospect for some content producers, others are concerned about the impact on the live model, and particularly on touring.

These are the issues that motivated us -Arts Council England, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre (SOLT) - to ask AEA Consulting to deliver this report.

Our aims were to have an improved understanding of the impact digital screenings are having on audiences for live theatrical performances, and to understand whether touring patterns were being affected by event cinema. We also knew it would be

¹ Culture of Innovation: An economic analysis of innovation in arts and cultural organisations 2010

important to understand who is engaging with digital performances, where they are, and whether they are more diverse than audiences at live events. We also wanted to learn what might be preventing those who produce and present theatre to enter the market for event cinema or other types of digital distribution and what the opportunities could be for smaller organisations to create digital content.

We welcome the findings of AEA's research as the first authoritative piece of primary research into the impacts of live to digital work on audience and organisations. The report has provided a roadmap of how Arts Council England, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre (SOLT), working with others across the sector, can help England's theatre sector to remain vibrant, vital and relevant while embracing both the live performance that remains unique to theatre's appeal, and the evolving digital technologies.

In order to ensure we capitalise on the growing success of the use of digital technologies Arts Council England and UK Theatre and SOLT will separately lead on the following actions:

Sign-post existing opportunities for Live-to-Digital capacity-building

ACE will work more closely with organisations like Canvas and The Space to offer training that might be of relevance to organisations wishing to develop and distribute digital content.

UK Theatre and SOLT will produce guidance for those who are looking how develop and distribute digital content, including the sign-posting of existing opportunities for live-to-digital capacity-building.

Investigate the creation of new showcasing opportunities

Although assessing England's Live-to-Digital presence overseas was beyond this study's remit, several interviewed emphasized the importance of England's Live-to-Digital export as a potential income generator, a 'soft' political tool, and an opportunity to develop inter-cultural exchange. ACE will explore opportunities for extending international showcasing opportunities with other parties such as the Department of International Trade and the British Council.

Facilitate the adoption of the Event Cinema clash diary

UK Theatre and SOLT will lead on encouraging better coordination among those programming and producing live performance and those producers, distributors and exhibitors scheduling Event Cinema programming in the same catchment.

Negotiate a standard agreement for Live-to-digital rights

UK Theatre and SOLT will lead on negotiating a standard agreement for Live-to-Digital rights, guidelines and royalty fees in collaboration with Equity and working closely with publishing houses trade bodies, collection agencies and agents. This will cover the entire digital lifetime of a project ('live', 'encore' and available in perpetuity).

Undertake further research

Arts Council England will commission further research into the impact of live to digital which unites all genres. While this study revealed some information about other art form effects, this was not the primary focus. Therefore we will lead on research which looks at the impact on opera, music, dance, museums (exhibitions), visual arts, combined arts and literature.

Arts Council England also will work with a range of interested partners on further action research projects to explore new collaborative approaches to building cross over audiences for both 'live' and 'live to digital' theatre activity.

UK Theatre and SOLT will lead on further research to consider live-to-digital's impact on the theatre and performing arts sector over time, and to identify emerging trends.

Together we will monitor the finding that streaming attracts younger and more diverse audiences, and understand how this knowledge can be put to good advantage

This response to the live to digital research forms part of a wider piece of work led by the Arts Council on gaining a better in depth understanding of the current picture of theatre production, presentation and audiences across the sector as a whole. Later this month Arts Council will be publishing an 'Analysis of Theatre in England' which provides further research on the current state of the theatre industry in England.