

Cultural Daily

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6 Lessons the Porn Industry Has for Filmmakers

Elliot Grove · Wednesday, August 6th, 2014

The parallels between real film and porn are almost exactly the same

It's a common misconception that filmmakers making content for the porn industry are sleazy, money-grabbing geeky sex fiends. In actual fact, the porn industry had figured out low budget filmmaking and digital distribution yonks before any of their more cultured filmmaking colleagues.

Many of the advancements in filmmaking and distribution techniques have had their birth courtesy of the porn industry. Filmmakers can improve their techniques, and their financial returns by looking at the lessons learned by their colleagues in the sex industry.

Short History of the Film Industry From Porn's POV

Four of the major developments in the film industry have been influenced by the porn industry:

1948 Polaroid and Digital Cameras

The porn industry realized that people love to take pictures of themselves copulating. Problem was, using a 35mm stills camera meant you had to send the film to a processing company like Kodak where your pictures could be censored. When Edwin Lamb and Polaroid were able to start selling Polaroid cameras in 1948, sales immediately took off. You can bet your last condom that these cameras weren't being used solely to take pictures of the family after church. It is estimated that half the pictures ever taken on a Polaroid were not intended for the family album.

Have a look at the first Polaroid TV commercial. I bet it will take on a different meaning.

[embedvideo id="h7k2uwJmwxo" website="youtube"]

When digital cameras became the norm on mobile telephones, no one understood their use better than the porn industry. Have a look at this scholastic article on this very same subject: The Logic Of Pornography In Digital Camera Production.

1981 The Battle of the Tape Formats

When videotape was launched in 1981, Sony came out with a high quality version, a one inch tape they called Betamax. The problem was – each cassette only took 30 minutes of footage. Sony practically gave tape players away, hoping this would create enough demand to ensure their format would become dominant.

Put yourself in the shoes of a film (porn) producer with a 2 hour movie to mail. The decision was simple: 4 heavy 30 minute cassettes vs. one light cassette (VHS) taking 120 minutes of smut.

Hence, we all ended up with the inferior quality VHS format flogged by Sony's competitors.

1991 The Birth of Quicktime

When porn filmmakers realized that the new websites and mobile telephones could eventually be used to distribute their movies, they started shopping around for a lightweight player. At that time, Apple was tiny and innovative and they developed, with the blessing of the top porn distributors, a lightweight, very stable and good online player – Quicktime.

2008 DVD vs Blu-ray

Sony learned from its strategic error in 1981, and when they developed new Blu-ray technology, they gave duplication equipment to the porn industry. Voila! Blu-ray is now a dominant format.

No one is more concerned about piracy and the threat to DVD sales than the porn industry. They have seen their income streams ravaged by the internet and have pioneered different monetization strategies including Pay Per View and magazine-style subscriptions.

6 Lessons Filmmakers Can Learn From the Porn Industry

1. Know Your Audience

What do Tori Black, Isis Taylor, Kayden Kross have in common? The correct answer is not that they are porn stars but that they each have tens of thousands of Twitter followers.

What they know how to do really well is to find their audience. Then they engage with them on many different levels. Follow their Twitter accounts and you will start to get a feel of what they are thinking and feeling. You will see what they like (and don't like). They tell people about their lives and what they are doing.

2. Direct People To Your Website

More importantly, porn stars know how to direct their audiences to additional paid for content. They know and understand their audiences and what they need. And they know how to market to them.



BurningAngel.com

3. Interact With Your Audience

Porn stars engage with their audiences. They respond to Twitter messages and comments on their blogs. They then tailor specific types of experiences to their audiences, and will adjust their profile to suit their needs, in the way that filmmakers make movies in different genres.

Have a look at Burning Angel, a punk porn site by Joanna Angel. Note her associate sites, her blogs and comments by users. Or look at the tamer Suicide Girls website featuring hundreds of girl-next-door types posing as pin-up girls.

There is much that a filmmaker can learn by looking how porn stars organize their films, create and engage with audiences and then monetise their products.

4. Nothing is for Free

Have you heard of the live cam-girl or cam-boy? These are web cams in the porn stars very own bedroom and you can see live interactive chats with mainly clothed performers engaging with their audience. They try to get the viewers enticed with the pre-show cam and then entice them deeper into the website for which you have to pay.

It's no different for us either. Engaging with your audience in the run-up to the shoot, and afterwards at festival premieres can whet the audiences appetite for your film later on – in cinemas or on DVD. An interesting development in America is the website Demand It – a widget that you can put on your website as a form of pre-sales. How interesting to know that there are 50 people willing to pay money to see your film in Huxtable. Set up a road tour with your film knowing that in each location you will have an audience ready to pony up some hard coins to see your film.

Don't give it away for free. This is the big lesson filmmakers can learn from the porn industry.

5. Partner And Collaborate

Porn stars use this effective 3-step: First they strongly brand each site to give the visitor a strong and unique experience. Often they are part of a coalition that works on this blindingly simple principal: "If you liked this, you'll like..." And this really works.

Each site cross promotes within the coalition, and usually a single membership fee allows you access to each of the sites on the network.

6. They Know How To Pimp Their Products

Porn stars know the value and importance of a strong campaign image. Do you have a scantily clad man or woman? Put their image front and center.

I'm not suggesting you get naked for your stills photographer, but I am pleading with you to get a striking image for your film, an image which gives me an impression of what the film is about on the very first glance. Then make sure you use it

Fade Out

The parallels between real film and porn, indies and majors are almost exactly the same, content excepted. With in the porn industry, as in movies, there are indies and major producers, small and large distributors. Porn producers face many of the same financial, legal, production and distribution issues as their independent filmmaker colleagues.

The film industry is fiercely competitive. everyone is scrambling for money and audiences. As a serious filmmaker, you will learn much on how to succeed from your adult film industry colleagues.

This article originally appeared on the Raindance website – www.raindance.org

For info on Raindance Toronto – www.raindance.org/toronto

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