



## ECFA's Survey on Children's Film Distribution in Europe:

### Create Promotional Power – Together

by Reinhold T. Schöffel

The distribution of high quality films for children in Europe is one of the most important subjects on the agenda of ECFA. This year we have researched the numbers of admission of films for children between 2005 and 2007. Therefore we selected 229 films and tried to list in which countries they were distributed in cinemas and how many admissions they created.

#### The ten most successful films for children in Europe (2004 – 2007):

Nr.	Title	Admissions	Countries
1.	Shrek 2	44.626.897	27
2.	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	44.291.100	27
3.	Ice Age 2	40.794.718	27
4.	Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban	40.560.018	27
5.	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	39.440.690	24
6.	Shrek the Third	36.094.783	24
7.	Ratatouille	32.620.566	24
8.	The Chronicles of Narnia 1: The Lion, ...	32.318.745	26
9.	Madagascar	30.051.878	27
10.	Incredibles, The	28.845.195	26

When we look at the films that got more than 10 million admissions in European countries we find one European film: Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit on nr. 19 with 13.821.063 admissions. All other 20 films with more than 10 million admissions were produced in USA. This is no surprise so far. In Western Europe these films were all distributed by the US-majors Disney, 20th Century Fox, UIP or Warner Bros. In the Middle and Eastern European countries these majors often give their films to local companies like Baltic Cinema, Bontonfilm (CZ), Intercom (HU), Prooptiki (RO), Tatra Film (SK). In Scandinavia and Finland some majors co-operate with companies like Sandrew Metronome Distribution. But the number of European films for children that were distributed in many other countries is definitely low. In our survey with 229 films there are 161 European productions. Only 15 of them were distributed in more than ten countries:

#### European Films for Children with distribution in more than ten European Countries (2004 – 2007):

Nr.	Title	Admissions	Countries
1.	Wallace and Gromit ...	13.821.063	24
2.	Arthur and the Minimoys	7.927.115	19
3.	The Emperor's Journey	5.723.328	26
4.	Two Brothers	5.095.574	17
5.	Valiant	4.756.880	21
6.	Oliver Twist	4.700.490	22
7.	Asterix and the Vikings	3.523.376	22
8.	The Magic Roundabout	2.587.770	12
9.	Kirikou and the Wild Animals	2.226.343	12
10.	Raining Cats and Frogs	1.271.109	13

11. Five Children and It	828.487	13
12. Millions	462.391	13
13. Terkel in Trouble	454.245	11
14. Back to Gaya	428.228	12
15. Strings	88.549	14

These films made at least half of their total audience in their country of origin and the rest in different European countries. Some of these films were distributed by the European departments of US-major companies, others by bigger European companies like StudioCanal. But almost half of these titles were distributed by independent arthouse distributors. So both big and small distribution companies may be able to organize a successful distribution.

#### European Films for Children with distribution in more than four and up to nine European Countries (2004 – 2007):

Nr	Title	Admissions	Countries
1.	The Wild Soccer Bunch 3	2.264.401	5
2.	The little Polar Bear, Part 2 – The Mysterious Island	1.944.994	7
3.	Laura's Star	1.855.404	8
4.	Azur and Asmar	1.759.320	5
5.	The Wild Soccer Bunch 2	1.628.953	6
6.	Bibi Blocksberg and the Secret of the Blue Owls	1.547.301	5
7.	Fourth Floor	1.175.159	6
8.	The Thief Lord	1.035.906	5
9.	Pettson & Findus 3 - Pettson's Promise	953.681	9
10.	The Living Forest	946.962	9
11.	The Ugly Duckling and Me	899.014	9
12.	Jester Till	872.364	5
13.	Lassie	756.225	9
14.	El Cid, the Legend	654.283	7
15.	Vitus	541.106	5
16.	Princes and Princesses	497.339	6
17.	Winky's Horse	491.618	5
18.	The Rain Children	332.591	5
19.	Zozo	307.811	7
20.	Zaina, Rider of the Atlas	246.483	6
21.	Black Mor's Island	238.589	5
22.	Franklin and the Turtle Lake Treasure	237.923	5
23.	Dog, the General and the Birds, The	210.732	5
24.	Dear Frankie	159.571	9
25.	Renard, the Fox	155.183	5
26.	Lotte from Gadgetville	145.442	6
27.	Pelican Man	112.893	5
28.	Blindflyers	102.121	5
29.	Villa Henriette	40.134	5
30.	Hop	38.561	5

Also some of these films were distributed by major companies, some by smaller arthouse distributors or other independent companies. Here the share of the domestic audience is in a significant way higher than in the top 15 that were distributed in more countries. Usually 80 % of the admissions came from the films' countries of origin. Exceptions are the British

films Dear Frankie and Lassie, but also some animation movies had bigger success not only at home but abroad as well.

### **The „Local Heroes“**

Of course there are many films that were distributed with a good reason only in their country of origin and countries with the same language. These „local heroes“ often are based on books that are mostly famous in their own country, like for example Anna M. G. Schmidt in Dutch language territories or Paul Maar in German language territories. Also here there are exceptions: for example the film Minoes, based on Anna M. G. Schmidt's book, was so good that Warner Bros. decided to release it in some other countries too – with good results.

### **Surprises**

Some examples for unexpected success: Planta 4a, a touching Spanish black humour drama about a group of boys suffering from cancer was distributed in Spain by Buena Vista (Disney) and made more than 1,1 million admissions, a result that usually only US-Blockbusters have. The film was furthermore released in several other countries by arthouse distributors with results between 3.500 and 13.000 admissions. Despite the fact that Planta 4a did not have the special star power or other promotional advantages in its domestic country the Spanish department of Buena Vista succeeded to create such an awareness for this high quality movie which made this excellent result possible. In other countries the arthouse promotion campaigns obviously failed. But the Spanish example proves, that even such a hard film can be a box office success when the distributor succeeds to create enough promotional power for his product.

That a film like The Blindflyers, which is hard to promote because it is so – in the best meaning of the word – unspectacular, will not be a box office hit everybody knew in advance. But with all the awards that this film won, including the German Film Award for the best film for children, there was hope for more than these 52.000 admission that the film earned during almost five years in the theatres. So the surprise was even better when this film made more than 41.000 in the Netherlands, where it was also distributed by the arthouse distributor Twin Films. Bea Appels, who runs Twin Films together with husband Dick de Jonge explains this success with the special attractiveness of this film for school screenings, that made a good share of all these admissions: „The story, the way it is told, but also the images and the very convincing acting of the young people.“ But Bea Appels also states the fact that The Blindflyers in the Netherlands is still only available in the cinemas. Neither a DVD was released until now nor the film had been shown on TV.

The Living Forest in Belgium, as Felix Vanginderhuysen, manager of Jekino-Distribution remembers, was an unexpected success. It was released on probably the one and only moment during the last years when there was no US-concurrent and because the Belgium release came shortly after the French release. So the French part of Belgium did profit from the promotion in France. In total this film was distributed in nine European countries and gained almost one million admissions.

### **Conclusions**

It is definitely essential to continue the co-operation, that distributors started within ECFA. Together they prepare applications for distribution support, exchange experiences and discuss strategies for new films. The most important aim must be to create the best possible promotional power for new high quality films. Whatever reasons we will find to explain the commercial success or disaster of a particular film: It is surely not only the quality of a film which determines how many children will see a children's film in the cinemas.

Perhaps more new ideas will come from other old or new ways of distribution. Digital technique makes it easier to distribute films. The borders between the different stages of distribution (cinema, non-theatrical, home-DVD, pay & public TV, online-video) soon will start to disappear. These stages are no longer determined by different technical standards. Films soon can easily be transferred from one format to another. A theatrical release then does not necessarily mean a high risk. A film can be launched step by step or stage by stage. It can be seen whenever there is interest for it – at festivals, in cinemas, schools, film clubs or at home. It can cross borders also without a national distributor. This way the films have the chance to sneak their way to the audience on every possible way. This vision of a multiple and flexible distribution may bring some advantage for arthouse films. Their producers, sales agents and distributors mostly are smaller independent companies who are free to decide where and when they want to present their films. Of course this „Amazon-way of distribution“ (everything is available everywhere) also bears the danger that the big blockbusters will also block the attention of the viewers. But also rare literature finds its way through this system – much more than before. So with our network of film enthusiasts all over Europe working in various organisations on bringing good films to the young audience we will have certain new possibilities and chances to create promotional power for arthouse films for children.

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**The complete statistical Survey can be found on ECFA's website**

**Sources:**

- European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg: Lumiere Database, <http://www.obs.coe.int/>
- Film och Kino, Oslo, [www.kino.no](http://www.kino.no)
- Filmförderungsanstalt (FFA) - German Federal Film Board, Berlin, [www.ffa.de](http://www.ffa.de)
- Pro Cinema, Switzerland, [www.procinema.ch](http://www.procinema.ch)

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