

interview

Australia which need to be looked at?

Yes. Two questions never get asked of the film producer – how are people going to learn of the existence of film once it is made, and how are they going to acquire it once they know about it?

It's a remarkable fact that money is available to make films but there's no money available to market them in Australia, or elsewhere, for that matter. And here we are under pressure to maintain a self-financing film distribution operation.

So there's some sort of lack of communication somewhere along the line where the types of film you see a need for aren't being produced, whereas there are quite a number of films being produced...

... for which there's no need. There is no market for them. Overseas producers tend to have done a lot more in terms of researching the needs of a particular market for a film. Australian film makers still suffer largely from the problem of the 'film I want to make' syndrome, which is perfectly valid as far as the producer is concerned, but we have got to try and reach a market that has a need.

We perceive needs in all sorts of areas: health, industrial relations, management training, all these sorts of areas which are served by libraries but no one makes any films in Australia for them. So where do they buy them from? They buy them from overseas.

Now, the more overseas productions there are to meet a need, the less money there is available for Australian production. We are trying to get some sense into the production side of the industry.

Can you name some overseas films in those needed areas for which there is no suitable Australian product.

Yes. The film *Now the Chips are Down* has been very widely bought. The video arts series programs by John Cleese, too, are selling enormously well, because they fulfil a need.

A librarian might buy those films because she knows straight away that 30 people a year are going to borrow it. This makes it a very cost effective exercise.

Now, they may like to buy Australian products but if the Australian product is no use they can't justify buying it.

Are there other problem areas in the film industry here which tend to affect the purchase and distribution of Australian-made documentary films?

Yes. The media here still tends to model itself on the broadcast image. There is not sufficient work done on treating subjects in a new and different way. There is also a need in some areas to make films that don't date.

Because designs and fashions change so quickly, it means the film will not have a long life if cars and people are used in it. If you are going to do a film, say, on the nature of the Tasmanian forest, you don't actually have to have anyone in it.

We do seem to be beset with difficulties – the breakdown that occurs between producers, the way they make their films, the type of films being made and the lack of funds to market and distribute them to reluctant librarians. Another area you haven't mentioned so far is the lack of bibliographic control for non-print materials.

Yes. I think that's a major problem. For a start there's no reference language. We break our films down to about 10 categories, things like social workers, health, education, industry,

sport and so on. Now, that's fine, that is the way we interpret the market as we see it.

However, you run into problems when we talk about health educators – the health education department of an education system, or the education department of a health system. So simply on basic classification we have problems.

Now when you look at it from the librarian's point of view I simply don't know where they would go for basic information of film collections. The only source of information about the Tasmanian Film Corporation is the Corporation itself. The same is true for the NSW and Victoria Corporations. Film Australia have got a catalogue, but the only source as far as I know is Film Australia. The National Library has been developing a catalogue of Australian films, but their problem is that not

'In Australia, money is available to make films but not to market them'

enough people tell them about new films. They can't ask about a film they've never heard of.

What it means is that the film industry needs to have a central registry so that no film can be made without it being recorded somewhere.

How could that be done? Who should do it?

The Australian Film Commission, if they wanted to do something useful, could become the depository for information on all films made. It could become encumbent upon the film producer to lodge a certificate of production for each film that was made, at no cost. There should be some reason for someone to lodge advice of the completion of film. If it was going to go into a national catalogue so that someone might actually ask to borrow it or buy it, it's a pretty good reason for telling people that it exists.

Well, you've suggested some changes for the film industry. What sort of changes would you like to see within the library community in Australia

with regard to access to films?

Well I think librarians under-rate their own influence for a start. They are more influential than they realise. Because they're in the role of informers and where you have a librarian who has got a barrow to push you can be darned sure that it's going to be reflected in her collection. I suppose that's a bit of a contradiction in a way.

On one hand I'm saying that they are more influential than they realise, suggesting that they don't exploit it, except in the areas of their own specific interest. So far it hasn't been made worth their while and I think this is a real problem.

Any sphere of life's basic philosophy will always come down to 'what's in it for me, why should I get interested in new formats, why should I do things differently?' Well I would say that what is in it for the librarians is that they justify their existence; because once your existence becomes necessary, then funding's a lot easier.

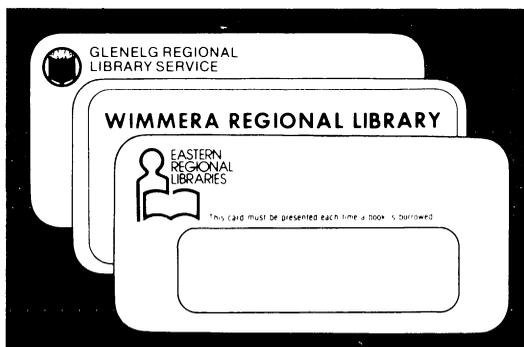
One of the reasons that librarians have trouble with funds is that there's nobody fighting the battle for them. But if you've got local industry hammering on the doors of the library saying 'why aren't you providing this material?' then the Council or the state authority must respond, because that's what taxpayers pay their tax for – to meet a public resource demand. And I think this is the thing that they've missed.

There's no better vehicle for elevating the whole status of the resource community and there's no better way of establishing it than by meeting real genuine need. And so far this is met largely by commercial outlets.

Go to any sizeable community and you will find a film rental library that is making money out of lending – actually earning a living out of it. Your public libraries don't do that. You don't exactly find yourself in milling crowds in public libraries, which, if they were genuinely meeting a need then you should be – you should have to queue. I see the average librarian as a spearhead because libraries are the established recognised public mechanism, whereby you communicate with the public.

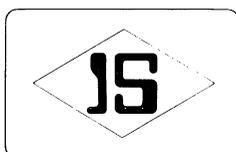
Well, John, thank you very much for giving up so much of your time. I've certainly learned a lot by speaking to you and I'm sure you've given many librarians plenty to think about, and, hopefully to act upon. □

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