

# Why Even Bother: An Analysis of the Strategies Utilized in Independent Movie Trailers

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## **Abstract**

Though they are essential to the marketing of movies, movie trailers have not been heavily researched and trailers for independent films have received even less scholarly attention than trailers in general. My research draws on interviews with staff in the film industry in New York and Chicago and on an analysis of select independent films and their trailers (*Donnie Darko* and *The Queen of Earth*). After reviewing the reasons why filmmakers promote their films through trailers, I examine how trailers for independent movies can be crafted to attract the typical educated, culturally-sophisticated audience for independent films (by embracing the ‘weirdness’ of the film) or manipulated to attract a broader audience (by downplaying the controversial material in the film). I also outline the key differences between trailers for independent films and more mainstream Hollywood movies. Ultimately, my objective is to identify the general rules or best practices for effective independent film trailers.

## **Introduction**

Trailers: a short glimpse into another world. These brief, but thrilling advertisements use advanced editing technology to offer their audience a feel of what is to come. A trailer is a marketing strategy for films that gives the viewer a 2-3 minute-long, condensed preview of a film. Other strategies are limited and not able to convey as much information about a film, as a trailer can. For example, a movie poster is an image with text, usually about creative people involved (i.e. actors, directors, producers, etc.), which can only show the viewer a standstill depiction of a film. Trailers, however, are short advertisements that showcase several scenes of the featured film and provide insight into the characters, themes, settings, and plot. A trailer can transport the viewer into the world of the film utilizing the scenes, special effects, some voice-over narration, sound effects, and music. Trailers have continued to grow since the early 1900s and have transformed into carefully edited mini-movie productions.

Despite the development trailers have undergone and their importance to the film business, trailers, as a genre and marketing technique, have received only cursory scholarly attention. Research on trailers for independent films is almost non-existent. This thesis draws on previous scholarly findings, trailer analyses, and interviews with professionals in the film marketing industry to examine the distinctive features of independent film trailers and how they compare to mainstream film trailers.

The first sections of this thesis describe the expansion and characteristics of trailers throughout history and go on to trace the growing cultural prominence of independent films. After this, I analyze the trailers for two famous independent films, the *Blair Witch Project* and *sex, lies, and videotape*, known for their distinctive marketing campaigns and role in altering the playing field for independent films. Next, I explore comparisons between

independent films and mainstream films, observing how their methods and differences are due to the financial limitations of independent film production and distribution. The differences between the two types of films often times follows through to the trailers. To support my claims about these differences, in-depth analyses of the trailers for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Donnie Darko* are conducted. To further demonstrate techniques utilized in independent films two, more recent, independent film trailers are analyzed, *Queen of Earth* and *The Overnight*. Finally, toward the end, I draw on seven more trailer analyses in an attempt to summarize the main techniques exploited in trailers for independent film.

### **The Evolution of Movie Trailers**

Today, there are a multitude of trailer houses and companies that cut trailers (i.e. Buddha Jones, Mark Woollen & Associates, and Jump Cut Creative), but this was not always the case. There is much debate as to when the trailer was first introduced in the film industry. What can be identified as the first movie trailers that were produced in the early 1900s were described as “coming attractions,” a series of clips that would introduce you to films coming to theatres (Johnston 23). The general consensus is that they were introduced sometime between 1912 and 1919 (Hamel 270). The National Screen Service (NSS) was created in 1919 and had a monopoly on trailers during this era. The NSS cut trailers for almost all the major Hollywood studios; the exceptions were Warner Bros. and MGM (Hamel 275). Warner Bros. had their own division that cut trailers for their films, which began in the late 1920s (Staiger 9) and MGM also used their own, relatively un-established trailer division. To put this into perspective, during the 1930s, MGM only serviced about 3,000 theaters, whereas the NSS serviced approximately 10,000 theaters (Hamel 274). Another trailer company during this era was the Advance Trailer Service Corporation, however, they were known for their still trailers, and their material was much

different than the NSS (Staiger 9). The NSS being the main player in the movie trailer industry during the early trailer era resulted in some problems.

Because a single company had a monopoly on movie trailers there was not a lot of variety in the techniques and the final trailer productions. The NSS had a tendency to cut their trailers relatively similarly and what resulted were trailers having a “uniform design.” The techniques that the NSS utilized when cutting trailers were “‘talkers’ with film scenes; ‘text’ with titles, stills of actors and animation effects; and short fifth-foot reels, all titles and with or without music” (Hamel 275). Some of the general statistics for trailers cut by the NSS in 1936 were that they were about a minute and a half in length-time, cost \$300-\$1,500 to produce, and about three to eight scenes were taken from the film (Hamel 275). Trailers have grown and developed since this uniform design.

Trailers have become the most important piece of advertisement for films and crucial to include in a film's marketing campaign, but initially trailers were not very popular. “In 1918, according to Arthur James, the Publicity Director for Metro Pictures, the four basic “necessities” of film advertising were: “posters, lobby displays, neighborhood and newspaper advertising” (Hamel 272). Movie trailers were not even on the list of the necessities deemed for film advertising, this, however, was before trailers were well known and established, and the trailers were very basic. As the technology for films expanded, so did the technology for trailers and one of the greatest advancements was the change from silent film to sound. The sound aspect allowed trailers to become their own entertainment. Instead of just using images from a film, they could incorporate sound (dialogue, narration, music, sound effects) to help sell a film (Hamel 273). The added complexities to trailers helped further distinguish them from other promotional materials because once technology improved enough; trailers were really able to tell their own story.

As trailers and other promotional materials became more evolved and important, the film budget allocated to promotion increased. “In 1940, Paramount approved a \$500,000 increase, MGM’s budget increased by \$250,000, and Twentieth Century allocated \$2.7 million to film promotion” (Hamel 276). Now, during the 2000s, movie studios allocate even more money towards promotional materials. “Movie studios will budget \$10 million per film for producing the marketing, even before adding triple that figure on ad buys” (Gray 49). Throughout the twenty-first century the role of the movie trailer has grown significantly and the amount of money budgeted towards film promotion growing as well, however, the amount of scholarly attention given to trailers has been scant. There are only two full-length academic monographs exclusively devoted to movie trailers, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (2004), by Lisa Kernan, and *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology* (2009), by Keith M. Johnston.

The purpose of trailers has also changed and evolved throughout the years. During the early-mid nineteenth hundreds, when trailers were initially introduced, trailers targeted everyone. Distributors did not use strategies to target a specific audience for the film; rather, the goal was to address everyone and showcase the film (Kernan 78). This coincided with the fact that films, during this time, had a broad target audience. The ratings system that exists now [General Audiences (G), Parental Guidance Suggested (PG), Parents Strongly Cautioned (PG-13), Restricted (R), and No One 17 and Under Admitted (NC-17)] was not developed until the 1960s and was cofounded by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and National Association of Theater Owners (NATO). Studios began to make distinctions between films, “children’s” films or “adult films,” and the rating system helped distinguish between the ages

most appropriate for the material. It was a way for the film industry to “avoid censorship” through “self-regulation” (Wasko 121).

The creation of the ratings system, along with trailers becoming more popular, allowed trailers to develop into more complex, more carefully edited pieces of promotional material. Extensive market research was conducted with findings that films generally appealed to different audiences (Kernan 120). Distributors began cutting trailers to target specific audiences. The targeted audience would generally be the consumers that would be more inclined to watch a film of the film’s genre. Adding elements into the trailer that would entice certain people to become interested in a film is one of the common techniques used to reach the target audience. For example, a trailer for an action movie will include explosions for the action/thriller genre audience and a hint of romance for the romance genre audience. An independent film trailer may be cut to have the film appear less controversial or transgressive than it is in order to attract a larger audience. What has resulted is that, “theatrical trailers (unlike TV spots) are still charged with drawing as large an audience as possible to *every* film” (Kernan 161). The trailers still aim to bring in as large an audience as possible, but now distributors also try to cut the trailers in a strategic way that will reach their different target audiences.

The outlets available for screening movie trailers have changed drastically and continue to change to keep up with technological trends. Initially, the only way for fans to view a movie trailer was to attend the theater to see another film. Then, with the rise of television, moviegoers were increasingly exposed to trailers embedded in network and later cable TV programming. “Producers and marketers may well be gaining considerably more control over the meanings of a text. When trailers were limited to a few minutes before movies, or a few television ads, their effect may have been more muted, but today’s proliferation of trailers means that most of us

watch each one multiple times, often unable to escape them even if we wanted to do so” (Gray 71). The Internet has completely altered and expanded the playing field for movie trailers; people are now able to view movie trailers on their own time, as many times as they would like, and wherever they please. Keith M. Johnston explains that, “mobility and interactivity combine in the changing role of the trailer audience: from mass spectator to individual participant...viewers select what trailers to watch (or download) and have control over textual playback” (125). With YouTube, movie trailers can reach a much larger audience. People are no longer stuck watching what theater owners or TV programmers choose to show them, they are actively seeking out trailers that appeal to them.

The relationship between the Internet and movie trailers continues to grow and has provided both opportunities (i.e. digital technology platforms like YouTube) and challenges (i.e. standing out amidst the “clutter” of multiple trailers) for film promotion. A challenge presented to the studios is that there is more of an incentive to produce even better trailers, both in quality and in content. The Golden Trailer Awards (GTA) began in 1999 and recognizes outstanding work in film advertising, including movie trailers and posters. Some of the different categories included in the GTA’s trailer segment are “Best Action,” “Best Comedy,” and even “Best Independent Trailer” (Golden Trailer Awards). The GTA’s have provided an outlet for film trailers to become their own type of theatrical production, recognizing the hard work that goes on in promoting a film.

The Internet has also ‘upped the stakes’ for movie trailers through the multiple digital platforms that provide consumers access to movie trailers. “Many cable providers now offer a free Movie Trailers On Demand channel, while many a commercial break contains at least one ad for a film or television program. YouTube, Hulu, Facebook, and MySpace, meanwhile, all

circulate trailers and previews, as does IMDb” (Gray 71). For example, Hulu, an online video streaming service, has a tab under their movie section devoted to trailers. The site is organized by movie trailers “Opening This Week,” “Top Picks,” “In Theaters Now,” “Recently Added Movie Trailers,” and “Popular Movie Trailers.” In addition, it gives the user the option to search any movie and when searching for the movie different trailers and clips from the film appear. Hulu allows consumers to view a trailer before deciding to watch a film; therefore a good trailer can make or break the viewer’s decision to watch the film. Many other digital platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon, give consumers the same opportunity to view a trailer before deciding to watch/purchase a film. These digital platforms also extend the life of movie trailers because trailers no longer disappear after being shown in theaters, they can promote the film years down the road. Even older trailers have been resurrected through the Internet because people have uploaded them on to sites, like YouTube.

Technological advancements have also helped the budgets for films, as well as trailers, go further. When speaking with Robbie Mack, from the Chicago based trailer company Filmack, he explained how “technology has really helped lower the cost of entry, lower the cost of production, and gotten better creative values. So it’s a pretty amazing feat to think about, that quality and everything can go up and the costs can go down” (Mack). What this means is that it is easier for filmmakers to enter into the industry because the costs to create, at minimum a decent quality film, are much lower than they used to be. The cost of producing a movie trailer has also decreased because filmmakers/distributors/studios are now mainly paying for the creativity behind the trailer; the number of hard costs for producing a trailer has decreased significantly (Garrett). The costs to entry decreasing and budgets being allocated more effectively have changed the playing field for both mainstream films and independent films. The

increase in the number of independent films produced is partially due to the lowered cost of entry; more filmmakers are able to enter the field and produce decent quality films on a minuscule budget, and therefore more filmmakers take advantage of this opportunity.

The major studios also benefit from lowered costs because they are able to use more money on advertising and hire several different ad agencies to cut more than one trailer for a film (Kernan 53). For many big blockbuster films there are multiple trailers, released throughout the year to build hype. This was not a practice used until recent years, when looking up films from the 1980s and 1990s there was really only one trailer cut. This makes sense, however, because back then the only platforms for trailers was movie theaters and television placements. Films, such as *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Lion King* (1994), only had one trailer cut during the time of the films' original debut. Now that films have a lowered cost of entry and have multiple platforms for placing trailers, studios, especially the majors, have multiple trailers cut for each film.

Universal demonstrates having multiple trailers for a film with its family animated comedy *Minions* (2015). The family animated comedy follows the beloved minions from the *Despicable Me* (2010 and 2013) films. Directed by Kyle Balda, starring Sandra Bullock, Jon Hamm, and Michael Keaton, and distributed by Universal. It premiered in July 2015, but the first trailer was released in November 2014 (Movieclips Trailers), the second trailer came out in February 2015 (Movieclips Trailers), and a third trailer was released in May 2015 (Illumination), closer to the premiere date. Each trailer introduced the audience to more content from the film and repeatedly reminded the audience that the film was coming out. The first trailer introduced the audience to what minions are, what they do, who their different masters have been, and then ends with three minions (Kevin, Stuart, and Bob) leaving what they are used to and coming to a

big city. The second trailer begins where the first left off, with the three minions (Kevin, Stuart, and Bob) looking off into the city and then getting picked up by a family who takes them to Villain-Con, where they meet various different villains and the audience is introduced to Scarlet Overkill. The third trailer combines the ideas from both trailers, starting off with an introduction of what minions are and their purpose, and then the three main minions at the villain-con. This trailer, however, continues to introduce the audience to new scenes from the film. The trailers allowed hype to build up early on, while still allowing an outlet for hype to continue to build throughout the rest of the year. Using multiple trailers is one effective way to utilize the Internet for film promotion because each trailer can be found online and re-watched until the next trailer installment is produced. Without the Internet, if a movie were to have multiple trailers everyone may not have seen the different trailers. There was no easy access to choosing which trailers to watch and as a result the audience could miss out on details shared from previous trailers.

Trailers have successfully adapted to each new technological advancements and societal trends. From the beginning of television to the invention of the Internet, trailers have continued to be utilized by marketers for film advertisement (Johnston 24). A current example of this is the way social media has affected movie trailers and film promotion. Social media is an increasing trend, however, not all generations are as acclimated with the different platforms. Companies are constantly trying to find ways to utilize social media to effectively reach their consumers because it can be used as word-of-mouth for the film, which is essentially 'free advertising' (Balio 85). Facebook, one of the largest social media platforms, allows movies to have their own Facebook Page; an outlet that can be used to not only post information about the movie, but other content as well, such as movie trailers.

Another major platform that is effectively utilized is YouTube. About 1 billion people use YouTube and each month about 6 billion hours of video are watched on YouTube (Smith). Movie trailers have the possibility of reaching 1 billion people through just this one Internet platform; it opens the doors for so many opportunities in the film industry. Lions Gate Entertainment utilized YouTube during its marketing campaign for *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1* (2014). *The Hunger Games* was originally a Young Adult book trilogy by Suzanne Collins, meaning the targeted audience was generally the millennial generation, which has been adapted for the big screen. The third installment continues to follow Katniss Everdeen once the games have been destroyed and she fights for her nation. One of the main production companies for *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1* is Lions Gate.

Lions Gate is a ‘mini-major’ so they have a larger budget for marketing costs than most independent film distributors, but their budget is still not as large as the majors, and, as a result, it is crucial for them to utilize cost-efficient platforms for advertising. “Lionsgate keeps costs down by taking full advantage of low-cost media like YouTube” (Barnes). Social media is the perfect cost-efficient platform because it has become integrated in so many people’s daily lives. A film that targets the millennial generation, such as the *Hunger Games*, should definitely utilize social media in their marketing campaign because the millennial generation is known for their use of social media. Lions Gate recognized this when promoting the newest *Hunger Games* installment utilizing YouTube not only as an outlet for trailer placement, but through creating a series called “District Voices” as well. The series included CapitolTV as the ‘official news source’ for the fictional capitol of Panem and YouTube stars wearing costumes from the film (Barnes). This allowed people to become excited about the film and involved with its fictional world in a new way. These types of videos are promotional pieces for films, but are not considered trailers

because they are not focusing on actual film footage or actors and actresses from the film.

Additional footage created for film promotion is solely another way for the studios to reach their audience and offer more audience interaction.

Overall, movie trailers are a crucial part of the film industry because through all of the changes they have undergone and adapted to (different distribution outlets, targeted audiences, strategies), they are still the main draw for consumers. “The theatrical trailer is ‘the backbone of all broadcast materials,’ said Friedman. It creates the first visual impression of the movie for the theatre and internet audience” (Balio 75). Trailers have also proven to be a fan favorite; “a 2002 survey by *Variety* and MovieFone found that ticket buyers cited trailers as the biggest influence on their movie choices” (Wasko 198). It is therefore vital that movie trailers adapt to the technological and societal trends to effectively target their audience because the goal of a trailer is to create an audience for a film.

No matter what type of film is being promoted, a trailer is constructed to gain an audience and make money. Meggie Cramer, Associate Director of the Kindling Group stated, “At the end of the day, trailers are all very fiscally motivated.” For example, the trailer is never used just for visibility; the company doesn’t just want people to see the trailer. The visibility aspect here is supposed to equal sales (Cramer). Even though independent films are not intended to reach the sort of mass audience reached by the latest Hollywood blockbuster, independent trailers are still cut in order to reach an audience that will spend money to see the film.

### **What is an Independent Film?**

Defining an independent film is hard because there are many ‘levels’ of independent films. There are the specialty arms of the majors (Fox Searchlight), ‘mini-majors’ (Lions Gate Entertainment), smaller known companies (Spike Lee’s *40 Acres and a Mule*), and much smaller

independent companies or individuals that produce or distribute independent films (Balio 115). Each group has a completely different budget for creating films; a company, such as Lions Gate Entertainment, is going to have much more money to spend on advertising for their films versus an individual who produces an independent film on their own budget. It is difficult to make conclusions about independent films when there are so many varying groups that distribute and produce them. At its core, a film is defined as an independent film if it is made independently of one of the major Hollywood Studios (Warner Bros., Walt Disney Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Paramount Pictures, 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, and Universal Pictures). As was just mentioned, however, sometimes major studios distribute independent films.

Independent films have been around as long as the major studios have been. The United Artists was a company formed in 1919 for the purpose of creating and distributing films without the restrictions of the studios (Kolker 320). The United Artists were the original independent filmmakers and they resembled those who consider themselves independent filmmakers in today's society (Block 4). These are the people who want to create a film on their own terms without the reigns of the major studios. Even though independent films always had a vehicle for distribution, they did not really hit their stride until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As independent films developed through history, the companies that distributed independent films grew and developed as well.

During the 1980s and 1990s independent films were on the rise, with movies like *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and the *Blair Witch Project* (1999) becoming unforgettable hits. It was during this time that independent films started becoming known as "hip" and "cool," which was in large part due to the few auteurs that broke out and the major film festivals becoming established. Auteurism is "a description of movies being the artistic

expression of a director” (Lewis 38). An auteur’s film uses a stylistic signature that makes the film recognizable by the director to the audience. Independent films became a vehicle for the auteurs vision because of the stylistic freedom given to independent filmmakers. A few auteurs that stood out during this time period were Spike Lee [*She’s Gotta Have It* (1986), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), and *Malcolm X* (1992)], Steven Soderbergh (*sex, lies, and videotape*), and Quentin Tarantino [*Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992)]. The films *sex, lies, and videotape*, *She’s Gotta Have It*, and *Reservoir Dogs* were all able to use the small cast, limited filming locations, while adding their own stylistic signature, to produce successful films (Lewis 317). When hearing these films many people can automatically name the director because of how they implemented their style into the film. Many of the auteurs of this time period, such as Lee, Soderbergh, and Tarantino, started off as “upstart independents” and are now well-known, well-established directors (Lewis 305). The films made by the auteurs were often times the films that won many awards at film festivals, got the attention of the majors, and assisted in independent films becoming popular.

Film festivals exploded around the 1980s when films, like *sex, lies, and videotape*, received awards and audience appraisal. Film festivals screen films to help them reach a larger, more informed audience. Some of the best-known festivals for independent films include Sundance Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival, and Cannes Film Festival. Festivals are especially important for independent films because it is a way for them to gain distributors, receive awards/recognitions, and reach an audience. “These events become especially important for smaller or independent films as press and audience attention can generate invaluable word-of-mouth promotion” (Wasko 206). When a film is acknowledged in a film festival and receives

any award or recognition it is a big deal in the independent film industry; many distributors use this to their advantage when advertising the film.

The Sundance Film Festival is especially well known in the United States. It was founded in 1978, was called the Utah/US Film Festival, and took place in Salt Lake City, Utah. The festival changed leadership and in 1985, moved to Park City, Utah, and was given the infamous title of Sundance (Kolker 320). The mission of the Sundance Institute is to discover independent artists, audiences, and to give consumers an outlet to discover these new works from independent artists (Sundance). Independent films utilize this outlet because, “Sundance [stands] for a new but well-publicized phenomenon: the low-budget, off-Hollywood film offering something distinctly different from the big studios’ star-driven blockbuster features” (Lewis 308). It is an event that people know and hear about; it provides independent films the outlet of “niche marketing” (Chin 38) because it can lead a film to acquire the publicity that it needs, in a unique way.

The trend of the rise in independent films and the increase in consumers for independent films can be seen through the growth of the Sundance Film Festival. All the following statistics were gathered from the Sundance Institute’s official website. The first official year of the Sundance Film Festival, in 1985, screened 86 films, had 13 festival staff members, and showed independent films such as *Blood Simple* (1984) and *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). The year 1989 was an important milestone for the festival because that was the year that *sex, lies, and videotape* won the Audience Award at Sundance. The film also won the Palme d’Or, the highest award at the Cannes Film Festival, proving it to be a breakout film, changing the playing field for both independent films and festivals. When looking at the statistics between 1989 and 1990 there is a noticeable increase in the amount of films screened. In 1989, only 97 films were

screened, but in 1990, 121 films were screened. From 1985 to 1989 there was only an increase of 11 films being screened, but from 1989 to 1990 alone there was an increase of 24 films being screened (“30 Years of Sundance”). Independent films were becoming more popular and more filmmakers were submitting their films to festivals to gain distribution and audience awareness.

In 1996, Sundance gave statistics for the first time about the attendance record, which was 15,504. Within ten years, to 2006, Sundance Film Festival would reach its record level of 52,849 people attending. These numbers show that there is still a large audience for independent/foreign films and even though the attendance has not reached levels as high as from 2006, the attendance levels still measure around 40,000 people, which is more than double of the records from 1996 (“30 Years of Sundance”).

Sundance Film Festival, even though it has become very popular, is still dedicated to helping independent films receive recognition. This was evident during the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sundance Film Festival in 2009. Out of the 218 films that were screened, 42 films were from first-time directors (“30 Years of Sundance”). Even though the festival has become well known, it has not forgotten about those independent filmmakers who need a platform to find distribution, an audience, and to really get started.

Film festival awards are often key to an independent filmmakers breakthrough success or their films awareness. When cutting movie trailers, it is something that can be included to help sell the film and Lisa Kernan acknowledges this when she talks about several different tactics used in trailers such as, “extratextual appeals are occasionally invoked as well: notably review, awards, and box-office figures” (14). Positive reviews and awards have been proven to be commonly favored in trailers for independent films. All seven film trailers analyzed in the “The “General Rules” for Independent Film Trailers” of my thesis exploit film festival

acknowledgements. This is a way to intrigue the audience that appreciates film festivals and their recommendations.

In the 1990s, the major studios created specialty units due to the unexpected commercial success of independent films, such as Fox Searchlight, Focus Features, and Warner Independent Films (Balio 139-143). The audience for independent films was large and committed enough for the major studios to create these divisions to target an audience that their current films didn't tap in to (Kolker 321). The creation of the specialty divisions was a creative ploy for the major studios because not only did it bring in a new audience, it helped the majors to win and be nominated for Academy Awards. The specialty divisions was a creative way for the studios to continue to produce "high-concept" films to gross money and become involved in distributing independent films to win awards (Balio 133).

The specialty divisions often ran into problems balancing the studios image while also distributing the controversial content of an independent film, an example of this was the film *Happiness* (1998). It was produced by independent companies Good Machine and Killer Films and distributed by Universal Pictures specialty division, October Films (Newman 24). The CEO of Universal wanted October Films to drop *Happiness* because of a masturbation scene. *Happiness* encapsulates what an independent film is, it is honest, daring, provocative, and was produced on a small budget. The specialty divisions were restricted in what they were allowed to distribute because of the possibility of ruining the major studios image. This was a constant problem between Disney and Miramax once Disney acquired Miramax; it eventually resulted in the Weinstein brothers leaving the company. The specialty divisions often would not distribute the most controversial, dark independent films. Films chosen for distribution usually had a "mainstream" feel of security to the "independent" films that the specialty divisions distributed.

Most of the specialty divisions only lasted until around the time of the Great Recession because they were not profitable enough. Fox Searchlight and Sony Picture Classics are two specialty divisions that are still in existence today (Kolker 321). Fox Searchlight is the one that has their main focus still on independent films; it has continued to be proven successful. The division has won the Academy Award for Best Picture for the films *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and *Birdman* (2014). The production budget for *Slumdog Millionaire* was \$15,000,000 and the film had a domestic total gross of \$141,319,928, making it one of Fox Searchlight's most profitable and commercially successful films. *12 Years a Slave* had a larger production budget at \$20,000,000, but only had a domestic total gross of \$56,671,993. *Birdman*, Fox Searchlight's most recent Academy Award winner for Best Picture, had a production budget of \$18,000,000 and grossed only \$42,340,598 at the box office domestically (Box Office Mojo). With all of these films Fox Searchlight profited to some extent and was able to receive Academy Awards, which reflects positively for their parent company.

From the rise and fall of Miramax and the other specialty divisions, there are many small, relatively unknown companies that distribute films. Two of the bigger distributors for independent films during the 2000s are IFC Films and Magnolia Pictures, both whose specialty is distributing independent and foreign films. IFC Films has worked with independent masters Steven Soderbergh [*Che* (2008)], Spike Lee [*Passing Strange* (2009)], and Richard Linklater [*Boyhood* (2014)], to name a few, since its establishment in 2000 (IFC Films). Both distributors have helped keep an outlet for independent films alive because of their successful "multi-platform method for distributing art and cult cinema," for example utilizing newer Video on Demand (or VOD) distribution methods (Hilderbrand 24). They have found that for many independent films that releasing films through VOD has either matched or exceeded revenues

from theatrical distribution (Hilderbrand 26). Again showing that there is still an audience for independent films and often times this audience prefers to watch the films at home where they can easily access them through these newer distribution models.

The distribution company is vital to an independent film because it helps market and finance the film. The end game of a distribution company's marketing strategy is to make enough money to recoup the development costs of the film. The distribution company needs to choose the most efficient and effective ways to market (through social media, the internet, television, movie trailers) and distribute a film (movie theaters, straight to DVD, VOD, and online distribution). The Internet has provided distribution companies with these newer models to distribute films, like IFC Films and Magnolia Pictures have demonstrated, but there are still strategies in place for distributing independent films through the more traditional platforms.

The number of theatrical screens devoted to independent films is minimal, due to the fact that the films typically draw on niche audiences and are lower budgeted films. For theater distribution of independent films there are two different strategies: limited release and platform release. "A limited release is designed for prestigious foreign and independent films lacking significant commercial potential. Such films open in a few theaters in New York and Los Angeles with the aim of gaining critical attention from journalists" (Balio 125). Independent films take reviews or any word-of-mouth they can receive very seriously because their typical audience draws on this type of advertisement. "A platform release is designed mainly for specialty pictures with 'name' elements that can more easily be exploited. Such films open on as many as a hundred screens in New York, Los Angeles and select markets" (Balio 126). A platform release will typically result in a higher chance of the film being released on a wider scale, but an independent film using limited release can occasionally result in a wider release.

The number of independent films released in the United States continues to increase, but their share of the box office does not. In 1993, 63 independent films were released in the United States garnering a box office share of 1.9%, in 2000 there were 129 released taking in a box office share of 5.8%, and in 2009 there were 274 released taking a much lower box office share of 1.2% (Hilderbrand 24). Even through these statistics it is easy to see the pattern of the popularity of independent films. The late 90's and early 2000's was when independent films really hit their stride, which is why many of the majors had their specialty divisions during this time period. As the 2000's continue, there is less distribution available from the major studios for independent films, but still several smaller companies that distribute independent films. More and more films are being produced because of the lower cost to entry for producing films with the advancements in technology, but less and less of these films are being released in theaters.

Since not all independent films are able to secure theatrical distribution many rely on other exhibition windows such as Video on Demand (or VOD) and the Internet. "VOD was being touted as the savior of independent film-making" (Balio 129); it allows independent films to reach a widespread audience without incurring large fees showing the film in theaters. The Internet plays an even bigger role in the advertisement for independent films.

The shift from expensive theatrical releases to multiplatform digital delivery opens up new and increasingly accessible ways for audiences to see art, documentary, and independent cinema...By changing the release patterns and delivery technologies, more films might find audiences, but the revenues for specific hits may be consistently lower. (Hilderbrand 28)

Typically, independent films are not placed in movie theatres for lengthy runs, if they are even played on the big screen at all. As technology progresses and allows people to stream movies

online and through services, such as Netflix and Hulu, independent film companies are discovering new ways to reach their audiences; people who are interested in independent films can easily access them. This can be described through the phenomenon of ‘the long tail.’

Chris Anderson’s theory of *The Long Tail* is about how the market for entertainment media is shifting away from a few ‘big hits’ and gravitating more towards several ‘niche’ items. This is in large part due to the development of the Internet and digital technological platforms, such as Amazon and Netflix. These platforms allow consumers access to millions of items that were never available in brick-and-mortar stores. Once people are given more options it is seen that people want more than just the big-ticket items, people actually prefer more specialized or ‘niche’ content. Everyone is different and has unique interests, the Internet allows people to pursue exactly it is that they are interested in (Anderson).

Anderson’s theory can be applied to independent films and how the Internet has allowed the industry to reach larger audiences. Services, such as Netflix, Redbox, Amazon, and Hulu, have provided people with easy access to independent films. Previously, fans had a hard time finding independent films because they were really only showed in “niche”-oriented Art Theaters (theaters are the film industries version of brick-and-mortar stores). This limited the audience to those who lived near these Art Theaters, drove out to them, or attended film festivals in order to watch these films. The rise of online distribution now gives independent films another reason to create successful advertising campaigns. Even though many independent films do not make it to theatrical exhibition, almost all independent films today still produce movie trailers because they need to create awareness for their film.

Today’s laissez-faire culture has allowed independent films to become both fan and critic favorites; we live in a society where people want to watch controversial films and can easily

access them. Independent films have proven to be Academy Award favorites; in 2015 many of the films nominated for Best Picture were independent films [i.e. *Whiplash* (2014), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), and *Boyhood*]. Typically, you do not see mainstream films, such as *Harry Potter*, a typical fan favorite and box office hit, winning Academy Awards. This is not always the case, *Titanic* (1997), one of the highest box-office grosses ever at \$658,672,302, won eleven Oscars including Best Picture and Best Director, being tied as the film that has won the most Oscars. However, independent films seem to still be nominated and win Oscars more recently and prominently. For 2016, the film that won Best Picture was *Spotlight* (2015), and other films nominated for the award were *Brooklyn* (2015) and *Room* (2015), which are all independent films. Independent films, including the specialty divisions' films, began taking over the Academy Awards.

In both 2005 and 2006, three of the Best Picture nominations went to films not released by major studios. By 2007 this was true of almost all the films nominated: *Atonement* was released by Focus Features, *Juno* was released by Fox Searchlight, and both *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will be Blood* were released by Paramount Vantage and Miramax. (Marcks 9)

Winning a prestigious award, like an Oscar, can help independent films because it introduces the film to a larger audience who can then watch the films online for a minimal cost and can be used to promote the film.

With the sheer number of independent films, the popularity of film festivals that promote independent films, access to independent films, and critical acclaim for independent movies all increasing, the focus on independent film trailers should follow suit. "Independent film has become more recognized, with agencies representing independent players, academy awards and

other awards going to independent films, and powerful stars and directors working in the independent sector” (Wasko 78). However, as mentioned at the outset, there are no full-length academic books written about independent film trailers. In following sections, I look into detail at the ways independent films are utilizing techniques in trailers when marketing independent films.

### **Case Study: *Blair Witch Project***

When marketing a film, it is essential to produce a creative campaign that differentiates the film and has a chance at making a lasting impact. Looking at advertising for independent films is particularly interesting because it is crucial for these films to spread the word in order to attain an audience and they have to do so on a minuscule budget. It is fundamental for the distribution company to utilize the tools that they are given. A great example of a distribution company successfully marketing a film is Artisan Entertainment’s campaign for *Blair Witch Project*. The *Blair Witch Project* is a thriller about student filmmakers coming across the evidence of a witch living in the woods in Maryland. The film was directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, and stars Heather Donahue, Michael C. Williams, and Joshua Leonard and has become a cult hit. The movie came out in 1999, right around the time that the Internet was just emerging as a platform for mass entertainment.

Artisan Entertainment worked with a very tight budget for the marketing of the film, the production budget for the film was \$60,000, and wisely chose to utilize the Internet as their marketing platform. Once Artisan picked up the film, the budget for the film increased, but the amount of money they spent on marketing the film was significantly less than the huge amount of money studios spent on marketing campaigns. Amir Malin, co-president of Artisan in 1999, commented about the *Blair Witch Project* and its marketing ““The film’s success reinforced the

idea that you don't need \$80 million budgets...it has taught the creative community that you have to make unique and fresh ideas” (Lyons). Artisan launched their site on April Fool's Day and posted as though the incidents depicted in the *Blair Witch Project* were real. “It presented ‘documents’ about the Blair Witch Mythology, an interactive timeline, the ‘back story’ on the missing student film-makers, interviews with the sheriff and search party, and video and audio clips of the found footage...Artisan premiered its trailer on the insider Ain't It Cool News website” (Balio 82). This generated a heavy amount of word-of-mouth for the film and many people began creating their own unofficial *Blair Witch Project* websites.

The teaser trailer for the *Blair Witch Project* opened with the text “In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary. A year later their footage was found.” The sound in the background is of the wooded outdoors, at night. It is very eerie and sometimes there are sudden loud banging noises. Then, as the text begins to fade out, the narration begins and says, “I just want to apologize to Mike's mom and Josh's mom and my mom. I am so so so sorry because it is my fault, because it was my project. I am so scared.” The girl is panting and sobbing, adding to the intensity of the situation and the trailer. As the narration comes to a close, a close up of the females face is shown, tears streaming down her face, her eyes glassy. The teaser finishes out with displaying the text “www.blairwitch.com.” The trailer does not show much, in this case little is more, it relies on the eeriness factor to scare people. It can be seen through the trailer that the budget used for the trailer was small (no special effects and minimal footage used). The trailer appears almost as though a random person put it together, which adds to the realistic vibe that Artisan trying to achieve.

People began to question if the material in the film was real, working up a lot of extra hype for the film and causing it to become popular due to the advertising strategy implemented. The distribution company effectively utilized the technology available (the Internet), low budget, and eerie aspect of the film to make the film “one of the most profitable movies in history” (Balio 82). The domestic total gross for the film to this day is \$140,539,099. People still talk about the creative marketing used for the *Blair Witch Project* and scholars use it as an example of a successful film campaign, proving it to have a lasting impact (Balio, Gray, Wasko).

What was learned from the *Blair Witch Project* campaign was that a film distributor must match its marketing strategies to the societal and technological trends of the time. The marketing for the film suggested “getting back to the basics: Concentrate chiefly on the storytelling, the interaction between actors, even on moments of silence. And, above all, invite the viewers imagination, don’t repress it” (Lyons). If a film were to use the same exact strategy of the *Blair Witch Project* now, it would not be as successful, due to the fact that the Internet has been around for much longer now and a film has already utilized this method to such success. If films take the general idea and motivation behind the marketing campaign for the *Blair Witch Project* there can be the possibility of much success, especially for an independent film that is on a minuscule budget.

### **Case Study: *sex, lies, and videotape***

Steven Soderbergh’s film *sex, lies, and videotape* is considered an independent film classic by many authorities. The film is often referred to as a “turning point in American independent cinema” (Perren 30). As a result, this thesis will analyze its trailer to see how it is cut, manipulating the material from the film to give off a sexier vibe because sex sells. *Sex, lies, and videotape* starred James Spader, Andie MacDowell, Peter Gallagher, and Laura San

Giacomo, had a budget of approximately \$1,200,000 and was able to gross a domestic total of \$24,741,667.

The film was distributed by Miramax, but they did not have any role in the film's development. Miramax's role in distributing the film is vital because they were known for "appealing to multiple niches and using sex, violence, and controversy as sales strategies" (Perren 31), which shows through in the trailer for *sex, lies, and videotape*. Originally, Soderbergh cut his own trailer for the film, but Miramax scrapped it. Soderbergh cut his trailer because it created "a mood perfectly emulate[ing] the mood of the film" (Perren 34). Miramax wanted to advertise it based on the strength of the film and the qualities that would entice the most people to see it, not based on the true content of the film. Miramax, "played up *sex, lies, and videotape* to the press in ways that helped the film move out of the so-called art-house ghetto" (Perren 33) through playing up the sex aspect. In order to display how the trailer uses this strategy a step-by-step analysis of the trailer was conducted.

*Sex, lies, and videotape* draws on the lives, and in particular the sex lives, of four individuals: Ann Bishop Mullany, John Mullany, Graham Dalton, and Cynthia Patrice Bishop. Ann and John are married, Cynthia is Ann's sister, and Graham is an old friend of John. The film itself does not contain many sex scenes and even the scenes that do involve sex mainly allude to the fact that the two characters are going to have sex or have already had sex. It is primarily a film in which characters talk about sex. For example, Graham has videotapes of girls, but the tapes are not typical 'sex tapes.' Rather, they are tapes of women talking about their sex lives; talking freely about anything that Graham wants to know, such as "describe for me your first sexual experience."

The trailer starts off by panning over a video camera with a close up shot and the text “the husband.” appears. The text is followed by an image of John in bed saying, “I think there are a lot of women out there who’d be glad to have a young, straight male making a pretty good living.” A different part of the camera is panned over while displaying the text “the wife.”



Anne is seen saying, “Being happy isn’t all that great. I mean the last time I was really happy, I got so fat.” The camera pan returns with the text “her sister.” followed by Cynthia laying in bed saying, “if you want to leave, leave. My life doesn’t revolve around these little get-togethers. I mean don’t flatter yourself.” The last character is introduced by the camera pan with the text “his friend” followed by Graham saying, “You know I look around me in this town and I see John and Cynthia and you and I, I feel comparatively healthy.” Fifty seconds into the trailer, after each character has been introduced, it is already clear that the trailer is focusing on advertising the film to its audience based on the sexual appeal. Two of the main characters are shown in bed,

looking as though they have no clothes on, for Cynthia the cover is draped around her where it covers her so you just see her arms and part of one of her legs and for John the covers are situated right around his waist so his entire upper body is seen shirtless, leading the audience to presume they just had sex.

After each character is introduced, the word “sex.” is shown in white text by itself on the screen with a black backdrop and is followed by Cynthia undressing herself, Anne talking about how she likes her marriage because of the security it provides, and Anne and John laying in bed together. The word “lies.” then appears in the same way that “sex.” did. The text is followed by Anne asking someone if they are having an affair while showing Cynthia’s legs being draped around John while he’s carrying her to another room. “Videotape.” appears in the same fashion followed by Graham asking Cynthia to let him tape her and Cynthia asking him what he wants to tape her doing. Then Cynthia’s tape is shown while Graham is presumably naked on the couch, just everything above his torso is shown and one of his legs, but everything seen is undressed. The rest of the trailer focuses on the videotape aspect; John asking Anne if she made a videotape, Anne saying she did, and the last image shown before the title is displayed is a video clip of Anne saying her name in a sexy voice.

The trailer leaves the plot open for the audience to believe that Graham is making a typical “sex” video. When Cynthia asked what Graham wanted to tape her doing, instead of him telling her he just wants her to talk about sex, it moves to showing a quick snippet of the video and of Graham watching it. There are not many actual sex scenes in the film. Most of the scenes in which characters allude to having sex are shown in the trailer. Three out of the four times Cynthia is shown she is not wearing anything or is alluding to sex.

In the trailer, the background of the camera pan used in the first half was used as an agreement between Miramax and Soderbergh. He had filmed footage to use in the trailer as a “transitional device” (Perren 34). The footage emphasizes the role of the videotape in the film, but again no one knows from the trailer that the videotapes do not resemble typical ‘sex tapes.’ The film is people talking about sex, but the trailer tries to sell the film based on actual sex to reach a larger audience. *Sex, lies, and videotape* is a great example of how distribution companies will manipulate a film for promotional materials in order to reach a larger audience.

### **Independent Films v. Mainstream Films**

There are many differences between mainstream and independent movies that derive solely from the limited financial resources available to most independent films. Since a true independent film is one that is not picked up by the major studios (Universal Pictures, Warner Bros., Walt Disney Pictures, etc.) the budgets are noticeably smaller. For example, *Spotlight* and *Spectre* (2015) were both released on November 6, 2015. *Spotlight* is an independent film drama distributed by Open Road Films and had a budget of approximately \$20,000,000. It is a film about journalists covering a story on child molestation covered up by the Catholic Church, directed by Tom McCarthy with stars such as Mark Ruffalo, Rachel McAdams, and Michael Keaton. *Spectre*, the newest James Bond action movie distributed by Sony/Columbia, had a budget of approximately \$245,000,000. This Bond film sends Bond all over the world to find out the truth behind the original organization Spectre. It was directed by Sam Mendes and features stars such as Daniel Craig (returning as James Bond), Christoph Waltz, and Lea Seydoux. The difference in the budget between these two films is huge, which is important because even though *Spotlight* was a popular independent film, its budget is still noticeably less than a

mainstream film. Other independent films, not as popular as *Spotlight*, have budgets way under \$20,000,000.

Hollywood studios like to focus their production efforts on “high-concept” films. “High-concept” films are the films that are designed to be big hits and are typically based on stories that are already familiar to the audience (i.e. superhero films). Such Hollywood films, “depend on the already known: many are based on pop culture comics and television shows, the generically familiar, well-known stars, and a signature style (high production values, stupendous special effects, and attractive audiovisual design)” (Lewis 314). “High-concept” films are the sorts of movies that have a high public profile (because their development and production are covered heavily in the media, because they feature name stars and directors, because they have enormous budgets, etc.) and, as a result, people will be more inclined to go see these films in theaters. The “presold” elements that Hollywood films draw on are expensive; independent films do not have the finances to buy the rights to popular comics, hire many big name stars, and implement astounding special effects.

The financial limitations for independent films restrict the film with what they are able to work with. Independent films are not able to produce films with high “production values,” because they do not have all of the necessary technology or labor to do so. The locations used are minimal and typically aren’t exotic locations, if there are, that will be where the film takes places. In contrast, in mainstream films, such as the James Bond movies, the filming locations are scattered all across the world. Independent films are typically not able to hire the most well known actors, and if they can afford one, will typically not have an all-around well-known cast. The financial restrictions affect the entire process for independent films, even including

producing, distributing, and marketing films. These are the films that aren't the focus of major buzz, except during the times of the major film festivals, such as Sundance.

The limitations that independent films work around have distinguished independent films and helped them become what they are today. Independent filmmakers take what they have and use it to their advantage, often times creating a film that is unexpected and honest. "These limitations can be turned to a distinct advantage by an imaginative and talented director. Thus, a small cast and limited interior locations are exploited to great effect in such independent films" (Lewis 317). This can be seen in *sex, lies, and videotape*. As previously discussed, the film did not have a large budget for film production. The film focused on the four characters and was shot in a few locations, such as houses, a bar, and an office. What resulted was a film that focused on the raw material of the film's content itself, it left no room for the audience to get distracted from the storyline by big explosions or exotic filming locations.

### **Movie Trailers: Mainstream v. Independent**

Movie trailers are cut in a way that is tailored to each specific movie, however, there are some noticeable differences in the strategies implemented between trailers for mainstream and independent films. Since mainstream films and independent films are very different, from the content to the finances, the trailers for each type of film vary to an extent as well. Trailers cut for mainstream films are typically produced by large trailer house companies, such as AV Squad. The large Hollywood studios have enormous amounts of money to spend and can afford the top-notch companies. These trailer companies are paid more to cut the trailer, but as a result, more is expected out of these companies. Stephen Garrett, founder of Jump Cut Creative, a New York based company that specializes in cutting trailers for independent films, shed light on the differences between cutting trailers for mainstream films versus independent films. According to

Garrett, employees working in a larger trailer house will typically work on trailers for six months and only work on a few trailers at a time. Hollywood films will also test market their trailers in public places, such as grocery stores, for market research, to see how the public perceives the trailer. Below, I discuss many generalizations of different trailer strategies utilized for independent and/or mainstream film. In the following sections I support the statements through detailed analyses of individual film trailers.

Mainstream trailers are often cut while the film is still in production; this allows films to have multiple trailers to gain yearlong hype for the film, as previously discussed. Trailers are viewed as an intense-concentrated version of a film, and things that might not work in a movie may work excellent in a trailer. For many blockbuster films the major studios will use a technique called ‘frankeinsteining’ the trailer. This is when the company will hire multiple vendors to cut a trailer for a specific film and see which trailer they like better or even parts of each trailer they like better and put them together. Sometimes they will implement double or triple vending, which is having multiple vendors make trailers but using all those trailers. For example, having multiple trailers to have one play in the summer and another in the fall, but each one created by a different trailer house (Garrett).

Independent films typically have their trailers produced by smaller, independent trailer houses, such as Jump Cut Creative, because of their financial restrictions. The basic economic differences between a mainstream film trailer and an independent film trailer are that the independent trailers are typically cut after the film has completed production, take less time to produce (sometimes as little as four to six weeks), and will utilize trailer houses that often will work on multiple independent trailers at the same time (Garrett).

The content of independent films is often more controversial and the filmmaker is given more freedom because they are not restricted by what majors deem fit for a film. The independent trailers as a result are allowed more freedom as well, but they also have to be creative enough to ‘cut through the noise’ and draw an audience (Garrett). One technique that is often implemented when cutting an independent movie trailer is to make an arty movie look more accessible and conventional to draw an audience. In this example the trailer house is toning down the extremely controversial topic or ‘weirdness’ of the film in order to interest those who may not normally be attracted to the film.

The other technique used in cutting independent trailers is just embracing this ‘weirdness’ factor of the film to create the trailer. In order to use the term ‘weirdness’ to describe films and trailer techniques it is important to define what is meant by the term. The ‘weirdness’ in this sense is used to describe an ‘unconventional,’ ‘uncommon’ theme. This is usually the topics of independent films, either more out-there or controversial, and the composition of independent films because of their financial limitations. Embracing this technique can be effective in successfully drawing in the niche audience that the film is intended for. Jump Cut Creative has effectively used this technique for cutting the trailer *Queen of Earth* (2015). *Queen of Earth* is a psychotic thriller film about two friends who reunite and discover they have grown apart. The film itself is very quirky and distinct; the trailer depicted the movie just as that, in an honest way. The way that the *Queen of Earth* trailer embraces this technique will be further discussed in the “More Recent Independent Film Trailers” section.

Several techniques are utilized for trailers for both types of films (mainstream and independent), but some techniques are also used more commonly for independent or mainstream films. The independent film generally tries to draw in a specific audience; often the more

educated, and film enthusiasts. Whereas, mainstream films want to interest as large an audience as possible to generate a large profit. An example of a strategy more prominent in independent film trailers is that they will showcase what has been said about the film by critics and call attention to any awards and prizes the film has won in an effort to entice people to go see the film. This is a strategy that can be used in all trailers, however, mainstream film trailers do not include award recognition and critics comments as prominently as independent film trailers. For example, almost all independent film trailers will include these recognitions, if the film has any (nine out of the ten independent trailers that I analyze use this technique). When choosing ten random, more mainstream film trailers, none of them included critic quotes or award recognition [*About Time* (2013), *Deadpool* (2016), *Frozen* (2013), *Horrible Bosses* (2011), *Road to Perdition* (2002), *Rush* (2013), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), *The Breakfast Club*, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)]. Mainstream movie trailers have come to rely heavily on their high production values to use images, special effects, and sounds to tell a story and get as large an audience in theaters to see the film.

There are a few general rules that the majority of trailers follow such as “some sort of introductory or concluding address to the audience about the film either through titles or narration, selected scenes from the film, montages of quick-cut action scenes, and identifications of significant cast members or characters” (Kernan 9). Trailers of all types of films and budgets will many times accredit at least some of the Creatives involved in the film (i.e. actors, actresses, directors, creators, or writers). Overall, all film trailers will use the film’s best asset, the asset that will effectively sell the film. Garrett said that the best way to represent any movie is to play up the best aspect of the movie itself in the trailer.

## **Content Analysis**

In the section that follows, I analyze several different types of independent film trailers. Trailers for films that were picked up by larger distributors, for films with smaller budgets and as a result lesser-known distributors, and for films marketed by a specialty division of a major are analyzed. This analysis shows that in each of the trailers similar techniques are employed, some that are utilized in mainstream movie trailers as well as methods seen mainly in trailers for independent films. These film trailers are comparable because they are all still considered independent films at their core, since they are not a part of the majors. The films budgets are much smaller and the subject matter typically more controversial.

I also conducted four interviews with people involved in the advertising side of the film industry. Robbie Mack from Filmack, Stephen Garrett from Jump Cut Creative, Meggie Cramer from the Kindling Group, and RJ Millard from Obscured Pictures. Findings from the interviews are woven into my analyses below; however, an edited transcription can be found for each interview in the appendices. All domestic gross total, distribution company, theater release number, and production budget information has been gathered from boxofficemojo.com. Film synopses and creative people involved data gathered from IMDb.com. All the images are screen shots from the film trailer analyzed, each listed in the bibliography.

### **A Comparison: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* v. *Donnie Darko***

In order to highlight the techniques used by trailers for mainstream films versus trailers for independent films I will compare and contrast the trailer for a mainstream Hollywood blockbuster, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, with the trailer for an independent film, *Donnie Darko*.

The trailer for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) has received much hype and media attention from audiences and critics within the past year. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is a mainstream Hollywood film that was released in 4,134 theaters, has a domestic gross total of \$932,582,894 (as of March 22, 2016), and a production budget of \$200 million. The film is the reboot of the blockbuster George Lucas franchise, directed by JJ Abrams, starring Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, and Oscar Isaac. The newest installment introduces a new group of heroes who try to stop a reborn threat to the galaxy.

It is important to acknowledge that this film is a sequel in the *Star Wars* franchise. It was a film that had been anticipated for a long time by die hard *Star Wars* fans. The audience already knew about the series because the franchise has been around for decades. When analyzing this trailer it is unique in the aspect that it's a sequel in a larger franchise, however, the trailer still utilizes many techniques commonly demonstrated in mainstream film trailers.

*Donnie Darko* (2001) is an independent film that became a cult classic. It was not popular at first, but has received much more attention in recent years. The film follows a teenage boy who becomes involved in crimes due to visions he has of a giant talking bunny rabbit. It was directed and written by Richard Kelly and the stars included Jake Gyllenhaal, Jena Malone, and Mary McDonnell. It was released in 58 theaters, has a domestic gross total of \$517,375, and a production budget of \$6 million. In 2004, the "Director's Cut" version was released in theaters and grossed a domestic total of \$753,147 and when adjusting for ticket inflation prices it would have grossed about \$686,443 in 2001, which is still higher than the gross for its original release.

The *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* trailer analyzed is the movie's full official trailer and runs about 2 minutes and 20 seconds length-time. The first image that is seen when watching the *Star Wars* trailer is a black and white speckled image wiped away quickly by a possible future

Jedi, so quickly that one might not even notice it at first. The possible future Jedi then begins climbing in an abandoned location and going down a rope into something unknown. As the first scene is introduced orchestral music begins playing in the background (which incorporated portions of themes from previous Star Wars films). The orchestral music is piano heavy for the initial portion of the trailer and the piano chords that are struck also set the pace for the scene movement. This demonstrates how the music syncs up with the scenes throughout the trailer, for example, when the piano chord begins to fade the scene fades to black and then another piano chord is struck and a new scene is instantly shown.

The trailer overall is very cohesive; the music, the scenes, and the dialogue match up perfectly. A scene towards the beginning shows a woman (the possible future Jedi) entering the scene while walking in the desert and the dialogue reads “I’m no one” and the woman is depicted as alone and unimportant. The scene mentioned earlier, where she (the possible future Jedi) is going down into the unknown matches up with the dialogue “who are you” and as she goes further down the voice begins to taper off. The character is masked and going down into the unknown and the dialogue fits perfectly because both her identity and where she is going are a mystery. As scenes begin to become more intense and action heavy, the music picks up to incorporate brassier, fuller sounding instruments (versus the piano and string instruments).

The techniques used in the trailer are definitely part of a calculated effort to get the audience in theaters to see the film. There is very minimal text used throughout the trailer; text is only displayed on screen five times. Three out of the five messages were focused on informing the consumer when the film would be coming out and encouraging people to purchase tickets for the film. These texts included: “This Christmas”, “December 18”, and “Tickets Now Available.” The only other two texts were “*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*”, the title of the film, which

informs the audience what film to go see and “LucasFilm Ltd.,” the company known to carry the *Star Wars* brand name. The minimal dialogue used also subconsciously could influence an individual to go see the film. The last words spoken in the trailer are “The force, it’s calling to you. Just let it in” and the “just let it in” is used as the screen fades to black and the title of the film fades in. This can be interpreted as telling the consumer audience to stop fighting the urge to see the movie and just go see it.

The trailer makes a big point of showing the audience what is in the film, but not showing or explaining too much. The trailer does not give away any important themes or plot developments, but shows enough to allow for speculation from the audience, specifically those who are avid *Star Wars* fans. Many fans watched the trailer hundreds of times before the film came out, analyzing every last detail to see what information they could pull from the trailer, what secrets would they be able to find out (Woerner). The effectively produced trailer and the constant speculation allowed the trailer to gain heavy viral attention. This attention became so significant that it was rare if you had not heard about the *Star Wars* film and trailer, again this is partially due to the fact that the film was a sequel in the *Star Wars* franchise.

There are a few practices not incorporated into the trailer for *Star Wars: the Force Awakens* that are worth addressing. The only voice heard in the film is narration from the movie, but even so the narration is very minimal. The trailer allows the images and music to speak for the film. The actors and actresses in the film receive no recognition; indeed, their names are not even listed at the end of the trailer. The trailer does not incorporate any reviews or opinions from critics regarding the film. Overall, the trailer does not need to add extra information in the trailer because the breathlessly awaited, much publicized movie can truly speak for itself. The main

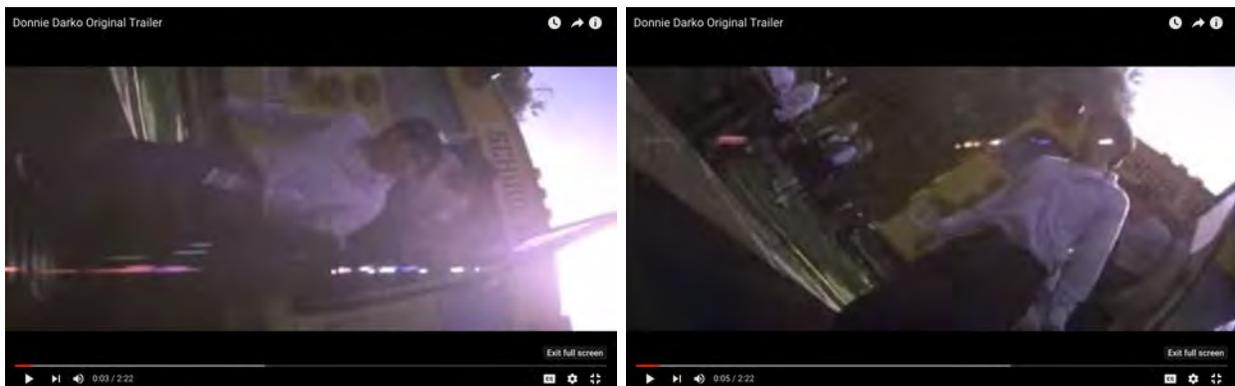
focus is to show what the movie looks like, incorporate several action scenes to do so, and sell the audience on the film to draw them in to see it.

This is very similar to other mainstream films as well; the techniques utilized and not utilized. As mentioned earlier, ten random mainstream film trailers were analyzed and none of them included any critic quotes or film recognition. The text each of the trailers did include, however, were creator, director, and actor recognition. *Horrible Bosses*, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *The Shawshank Redemption* trailers all gave recognition to the main actors and actresses involved in the film. *About Time*, *Road to Perdition*, *Rush*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *The Da Vinci Code* trailers all gave recognition to the directors or creators of the film.

Some of these mainstream film trailers – such as the ones for *Frozen* and *Deadpool* – resemble the *Star Wars* trailer in not giving much, if any, recognition, beyond the distributor of the film. These trailers, although not sequels, were much anticipated films because *Deadpool* is another comic film and there is an avid fan base for the Marvel comic films. *Frozen* was Disney's newest installment of an animated musical, which usually receives much hype. The mainstream film trailers tend to rely on the “presold elements” to sell the film (the special effects, Hollywood stars, and the cinematic design). These trailers, like the *Star Wars*, are very cohesive. The trailers themselves are big “Hollywood-esk” productions. For example, in the *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* trailer, everything synchronizes up perfectly and crisply. The sound effects, music, action scenes, and film narration all change together, at the same time. Overall, even though the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* film was a long awaited sequel, many of the tactics utilized in its initial trailer parallel tactics used in many mainstream film trailers.

*Donnie Darko* is a cult classic (a film with a small but cultishly devoted audience) that has received a lot of attention. As stated earlier, it is an eerie independent film about an adolescent teenager's mental illness that causes him to become friends with an imaginary large bunny rabbit. The trailer for the film contributes to the eeriness and 'weirdness' of the film through the images, dialogue, and text chosen to display.

The trailer begins with the voice over "It was as though this plan had been with him all his life, pondered through the seasons now in its fifteenth year crystalized with the pain of puberty" with the first image shown of Donnie jumping out of a school bus. The image appears sideways and rotates until it is upright.



The trailer then moves to students walking in and out of a school building, the video is speed up, and shifts to the teacher, whose dialogue was used at the beginning of the trailer, reading a book to the class. None of the shots selected at the beginning of the trailer are horrifying, however, there is still eeriness to each shot, and something just does not feel right. This sets up the audience for the rest of the trailer because watching the beginning of the trailer you know that Donnie is, at the very least, not an ordinary teenage boy. The dialogue at the beginning adds to this by foreshadowing what the movie is about, this young man who is living his life through pain and alienation.

The sound effects and narration chosen for the trailer are important to note because each plays an important role in creating the dark mood of the trailer. The song chosen for the trailer is very eerie; a song that sounds like it would be from a horror film. The trailer is dialogue heavy and is utilized to educate the audience on the film. The dialogue begins at the first second of the trailer and goes until the movie title is displayed, with very few breaks in the dialogue. The *Star Wars: Force Awakens* trailer also utilized dialogue for the trailer, however, there is a noticeable difference between the strategies used in the *Star Wars* trailer compared to the *Donnie Darko* trailer.

The *Star Wars* trailer only used a few words of dialogue from the film, and the dialogue included did not inform the audience of what the film was about, but did contribute to the design and cohesiveness of the trailer and was used more as a tactic to sell you on the film. The dialogue used in the *Donnie Darko* trailer contained more information about what the film was about; it takes you through various scenes with different people and different conversations, showcasing Donnie's interactions with the people in his life. The *Donnie Darko* trailer uses film dialogue as a tactic to engage the viewer with the actual story of the film.

Text is often used in a trailer for several reasons: to show the title, names of actors and actress, release dates, companies involved with the film, awards or recognition of the film, praise from other known sources, or words used to describe the film. As mentioned earlier, the *Star Wars* trailer incorporated minimal text into the trailer and what was used was more to encourage the audience to go see the film. The *Donnie Darko* trailer does not rely heavily on text either, but the way the trailer features the text varies dramatically from that of the *Star Wars* trailer. The first text seen in the trailer is the name of a distribution company; 17 seconds into the trailer three of the main companies involved are showcased on screen. The first being Newmarket (a

distribution company), followed by Pandora and Flower Films (both production companies for the film). The next text enters at 54 seconds and is the word 'visions' which is followed by "time travel", "sacrifice", "the only way to unwind the future", and "is to follow the path"; these are words used to describe the cryptic plot of the film to the audience. The use of text flashed on the screen again contributes to the way the trailer paints a picture of the film; it tells the audience what the film is about, highlighting its key themes and mysterious qualities.

The trailer focuses on the dark theme of the film through text, images, dialogue and music. The last descriptive text incorporated into the trailer is "dark", "darkest", and "darko", right before introducing the name of the film to the audience. The trailer is playing off of the dark, psychological feel of the movie. The images become very dark and include images and sketches of the bunny, fire, dark skies, and an axe. Even the images that appear to be 'normal' have a 'dark' feel to them. For example, when Donnie is talking to his psychiatrist he says "I made a new friend" and she asks him "real or imaginary" and he responds "imaginary." The scene gives off a very uncomfortable vibe, partially because the character of Donnie is very dark and mysterious. He looks like a normal teenage boy, but at the same time his eyes seem to carry no life and he doesn't know how to converge in a normal conversation. Even in a normal conversation with a girl, she says her mom got a restraining order against her dad because he has emotional problems and Donnie immediately responds with, "Oh I have those too. What kind of emotional problems does your dad have?" He seems almost excited to talk about it and the girl seems a little thrown off. The large bunny is also quoted a few times in the trailer, his voice very distorted and eerie, saying "wake up Donnie," "don't worry, you got away with it," and "you should already know that," in response to Donnie saying "when's this gonna stop?" The bunny's voice introduces you to the force that is controlling Donnie; you see his influence.

The very last part of the *Donnie Darko* trailer introduces the actors and actresses starring in the film. Each name is shown followed by a still/image from the film. The actor and actress recognition is a tactic used in both mainstream and independent film trailers. The *Star Wars* trailer did not utilize it, however, *Horrible Bosses*, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *The Shawshank Redemption* all did. There is a much greater chance that an individual who plays a relatively significant role in the movie (director, actor, writer, etc.) is featured in the trailer for independent films. The *Donnie Darko* trailer showcases eight main actors and actresses. After listing all the different actors and actresses an end credit screen appears that reiterates the actors, actresses, and companies involved with the film.

### **More Recent Independent Film Trailers**

This section looks at the trailers for two different independent films cut by the company Jump Cut Creative. The strategies utilized in the *Donnie Darko* trailer will be further analyzed, contributing more to the discussion of techniques in independent films versus mainstream films.

*Queen of Earth* is a psychological thriller about two friends who have drifted apart. Its trailer deliberately enhances the ‘weirdness’ of the film, is not afraid to push boundaries and appear ridiculous and over the top in order to prove a point. The film was directed and written by Alex Ross Perry, and stars Elisabeth Moss and Katherine Waterston. The two friends are Catherine (Elisabeth Moss) and Virginia (Katherine Waterston), with Catherine going through a dark time in her life. The distributor for the film was IFC and it had a domestic total gross of \$91,218. The trailer starts out with the screen reading “IFC Films” and a voiceover of star Elisabeth Moss saying “It drives me crazy that places like this are so close to the city...yea you know where tranquility isn’t just a myth.” Right when that bit of dialogue ends eerie music, with strong piano cues begins playing and the screen reads “Official Selection 65 Internationale

Filmfestspiele Berlin.” Showing that independent film trailers will list different film festival awards in the trailer to give the film credibility in its field. This will be further supported through the analyses of other independent films.

Many quick clips of scenes are shown and they continuously fade out to and into black. During this portion of the trailer you first see the two friends in the car driving and talking, then the narration begins and a scene of a peaceful lake appears, a new shot is shown where Virginia walks over to see Catherine sleeping and watches her, a close up of grass is shown with Catherine walking behind it in the background and then the title appears for the first time. The title *Queen of Earth* enters the screen for about a second in a bright red/pink color in a script font and then disappears. It’s almost as if the title of the film is not too important. The font and color they chose fit well with the theme of the movie. As the trailer continues, however, the title is shown again at the end, with the same style.



Finally at the end the narration says the name of the movie again. The title is reinforced throughout the trailer, but does not feel forced. When it is shown it is only for a few seconds, in a minimalistic that doesn't overwhelm the audience, and the narration states it a few times. The trailer is trying to use tactics to get the audience to remember the title on a subconscious level.

The shots chosen for the trailer add to the 'weirdness' vibe. There is a large focus on nature and the outdoors in the trailer; switching between scenes of the characters and images of the lake and the outdoors. In the trailer there are many eerie, dark, 'weird' scenes that are shown. There is glass thrown and shattered followed by a close-up shot of Catherine saying, "I could murder you right now and no one would ever know." For about ten seconds of the trailer there is a scene of Catherine on the floor being harassed and touched by a group of people crowding around her. The trailer introduces the scene with Catherine on the floor fighting away hands, but then switches to a point-of-view shot from Catherine's perspective and you see the people trying to harass her. Then an image of one of the male characters closing a door followed by more of the harassment scene, switching between both perspectives again. Finally, Catherine screams, "Leave me alone," before the title is displayed for the second time and the trailer begins to wrap up. The scenes give the audience an uncomfortable feeling because it lasts for a long time and you experience it from both perspectives.

The narration in the film is used throughout the trailer and says things that both strengthen the credibility of the film, but also includes statements that could make the film appear ridiculous. The voice over begins with "from Alex Ross Perry the acclaimed writer/director of Listen Up Philip and the Color Wheel," this is often used in trailers to grab the attention of the audience that likes the writer/director mentioned and their films. The last narration in the trailer is "Alex Ross Perry's *Queen of Earth*" and this closes out the trailer. The

trailer puts an emphasis on his name because the audience that likes his other films is one of the main audiences this trailer is targeting. Director recognition is a very common technique used in both mainstream and independent film trailers. It is not a strategy exclusive to independent film trailers, however, the value in independent film trailers is that it is really targeting this specific niche audiences. The directors are usually known for specific styles and themes used and in independent films it is crucial to use the directors to reach their targeted audience.

When introducing the actors/actresses in the films it lists Catherine Waterstone “in a role you’ll never forget” and Elizabeth Moss “as you’ve never seen her before.” At the end of the film trailer the title comes across the screen again and then quotes from publications: Variety said, “An acidly funny and unnerving portrait of a psychological breakdown”, The Village Voice said, “Katherine Waterston is startlingly impressive” and “A stylish, whispery love letter to teasing psychological horror”, and The Hollywood Reporter said, “Elisabeth Moss electrifies.” The trailer supports the claim that using quotes from reliable sources is another way to give the film credibility and can entice a larger audience.

When interviewing Stephen Garrett he provided an inside look at the thought process behind the *Queen of Earth* trailer. The choice to enhance the ‘weirdness’ of the film was a decision by the company because it was a low-budget film with low stakes and the projected audience for the film was very minimal. There were not many risks involved with going all out in the trailer. The trailer was successful and stood out because of the stylistic decisions that enhanced the ‘weirdness’ of the film. When speaking about the trailer he said, “it’s really funny and it’s really distinct and I think it really stands apart. It embraces the weirdness of the movie in an honest way and as well as an homage to the kinds of 70s movies that this movie was inspired by so it really works on a lot of different levels.” The trailer was written about in the film blog

post by the Collider Staff “The 15 Best Movie Trailers of 2015.” The article ranked the *Queen of Earth* trailer #6, ahead of trailers for blockbuster films *Deadpool* and *Magic Mike XXL* (2015) (Collider Staff). This shows that the film trailer was able to ‘cut through the noise’ which is what Garrett said, “it’s one way to kind of cut through the noise, especially because it’s a super low budget movie with a small distributor.” This is important because without a distinctive trailer *Queen of Earth* can easily be seen as a film that would be forgotten.

*The Overnight* (2015) is an independent film distributed by the Orchard and is about a couple that is invited over to dinner with another couple they’ve just met. The evening turns into a bizarre night with many sexual activities. The film was written and directed by Patrick Brice, starring Adam Scott, Taylor Schilling, Jason Schwartzman, and Judith Godrèche. The film had a domestic total gross of \$1,110,522. The couple that just moved to town is Alex (Adam Scott) and Emily (Taylor Schilling) and the friendly couple who invites them over for dinner is Kurt (Jason Schwartzman) and Charlotte (Judith Godrèche). This movie is a bizarre independent film with a lot of humor and character; the trailer portrays the movie exactly as it is. The trailer opens with the dialogue from the film with the very first image being of a pair of boxers, panties, and bras hanging over a ledge outside at night with the narration, “if you’re uncomfortable you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.” Immediately the viewer knows that the film is going to deal with something that will push the boundaries a bit. This then transitions straight into the distribution company, The Orchard, running across the screen.

The music compliments the trailer perfectly; it speeds up when the trailer becomes more intense and slow downs or stops at appropriate moments; the song played has very zany beats that by themselves give off a suggestive vibe. The film is almost displayed as if it is going to be a horror movie because of the darkness of all the scenes and the material used in the trailer. The

trailer follows a few of the techniques depicted in the trailer for *Queen of Earth*; it used quotes from different websites about the film to show how well received it was and informs the viewer of the festival in which it participated. Towards the beginning of the trailer it listed that the film was an official selection Sundance Film Festival. This is crucial for independent films to add to their trailers because, as previously discussed, the Sundance Film Festival is one of the largest and most popular film festivals for independent films. If a film has done well at Sundance there is a much larger chance that it will become more popular.

Although the trailers for *Queen of Earth* and *The Overnight* used similar techniques, their implementation varies greatly. Both film trailers used many different quotations to showcase the reasons to go see these films, drawing on the idea if that many people like something they will influence even more people to go. In *The Overnight* trailer, the quotes are intertwined throughout the trailer to enhance the moviegoers experience. At the end of the trailer the clips were shorter with a strobe light feel attached to them and the text being quoted became shorter and shorter. Quotes would end up reading things such as “Suprising!” from Buzzfeed, “Hilarious!” from New York, and “Titillating!” from Hitfix. The text is all in a bright yellow and blue. The clips shown become more and more suggestive towards the end and the film is depicted as kinky. Some scenes shown included one of the women closing a door with a mischievous, sexy look on her face, the couples all together in a hot tub, people kissing, some of them on a bed with messed up covers, the couples drinking, dancing, and skinny dipping together.

The trailer finishes with Emily looking through a hole in the wall and then a close up of an eye appears, all in red lighting, and the eye disappears and the title appears on the screen. The last scene is Emily and Alex sitting together with Alex whispering, “This is California, maybe this is what dinner parties are like.” The actors and actresses in the film were not accredited,

showing that not all independent film trailers, like mainstream trailers, actor and actress recognition.

### **The “General Rules” for Independent Film Trailers**

My comparison between the trailers for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Donnie Darko* and my in-depth analyses of several independent film trailers from *sex, lies and videotape* to *Queen of Earth* have identified a number of common practices utilized in independent film trailers. As Bill Woolery stated “a trailer is basically one emotional moment from beginning to end” (Candler). In order to catalogue the “general rules” for independent movie trailers, below I draw on both the in-depth analyses above and further analysis of several other independent film trailers in determining which techniques are most commonly utilized. The films I’ll be using for further analysis are *Blue Valentine* (2010), *Carol* (2015), *Clerks* (1994), *Juno* (2007), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and *Tangerine* (2015). Each independent film analyzed below is quirky in its own way, exploring issues or topics mainstream films typically avoid.

*Blue Valentine* is a romance drama that follows a couple through the course of their relationship. It was directed by Derek Cianfrance, starred Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams, distributed by the Weinstein Company, and the film’s domestic total gross is \$9,706,328.

*Carol* is a romance drama about a young female photographer who falls in love with an older woman. The director was Todd Haynes, starring Cate Blanchett, Rooney Mara, and Sarah Paulson, the Weinstein Company was the distributor, and it had a domestic gross total of \$12,698,818.

*Clerks* is a comedy on the daily life of a convenience store clerk. It was written and directed by Kevin Smith, starred Brian O’Halloran, Jeff Anderson, Marilyn Ghigliotti, and Kevin Smith, was distributed by Miramax, and the domestic total gross was \$3,151,130.

*Juno* is a comedy about a teenage girl who winds up with an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. The director was Jason Reitman, the film starred Ellen Page, Michael Cera, Jason Bateman, and Jennifer Garner, was distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, and the domestic total gross was \$143,495,265.

*Little Miss Sunshine* is a comedy about a dysfunctional family who takes a cross-country trip to bring their daughter to a beauty pageant. Jonathan Dayton was the director, Steve Carell, Toni Collette, and Greg Kinnear all starred in this quirky film, Fox Searchlight was the distributor, and the movie had a domestic total gross of \$59,891,098.

*Pulp Fiction* is a crime drama that has become a cult favorite that follows the lives of hit men, a boxer, a gangster's wife, and bandits. It was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, starred John Travolta, Uma Thurman, and Samuel L. Jackson, was distributed by Miramax, and it had a domestic total gross of \$107,928,762.

*Tangerine* is a comedy about two girls who are looking for the pimp that broke one of their hearts. The director was Sean Baker, stars included Kitana Kiki Rodriguez, Mya Taylor, and Karren Karagulian, Magnolia was the distributor, and the film had a domestic total gross of \$702,354.

All seven of the films chosen for further analysis use film festival recognition in their trailers. *Blue Valentine* used ten seconds from the first twenty seconds of the 1 minute and 52 second trailer to showcase their involvement in several different film festivals "Official Selection Cannes Film Festival," "Official Sundance Film Festival," and "Official Selection Toronto Film Festival," to give the film as much accreditation as possible. *Carol* began the trailer with their accreditation in film festivals "Official Selection Festival De Cannes" and "Best Actress Festival De Cannes," on two separate stills to showcase the importance of each recognition. *Juno's* trailer

was another trailer that began right off the bat with festival accreditation. *Juno* is a quirky film and the trailer began in that fashion; the first image is Juno standing outside facing a house and “Official Selection 2007 Toronto International Film Festival” and “Official Selection 2007 Telluride Film Festival” appeared at the top of the screen.



*Tangerine*'s trailer shows the text “Official Selection Sundance Film Festival 2015” just before the trailer reaches a minute. *Clerks* was the winner of several awards and placed these recognitions towards the end of the trailer “Winner! International Critics Week Prize 1994 Cannes Film Festival. Filmmaker’s Trophy 1994 Sundance Film Festival.” *Little Miss Sunshine* opened the trailer with the text “Official Selection Sundance Film Festival” to entice the audience from the start. *Pulp Fiction* uses both the narration technique and text scrolling across the screen to inform the audience that the film was the “Winner of the 1994 Palme D’or, The best picture of the Cannes Film Festival.”

As stated in the analyses for *Queen of Earth* and *The Overnight*, independent trailers may rely more heavily on reviews or quotes about the film. *Tangerine* is another example of this because it uses four different review quotes in the trailer to emphasize what other people liked about the film and to give the film credibility. It references The Guardian “Like nothing you’ve seen before”, The New York Times “Gorgeous. A perfectly cast, beautifully directed movie”,



Buzzfeed “Riotous, daring and, crackling with vitality”, and The Village Voice “Fierce and full of life.” Each of these news sources draws a different audience. For example, BuzzFeed reaches the millennial generation while The Guardian reaches a larger demographic range, including older generations. The trailer includes reviews from each of these sources to interest a larger audience, not just limiting themselves to one generation.

*Little Miss Sunshine*’s trailer also focused on accreditation from other sources, using review quotes from The Hollywood Reporter “a perfect combustion of character and comedy”,

San Francisco Chronicle “freshness and daring with a hilarious script”, Rolling Stone “the road is twisted and so are the laughs. This one is a winner”, and Reuters “a brainy blend of farce and heart.” People who highly respect certain sources may be more inclined to watch a film that the source spoke highly of.

The trailers for independent films like to capitalize on the talent who are involved in the film, especially from their past work in film. Those individuals showcased in the trailer are typically the actors, actresses, director, producer, or less frequently, the screenwriter. All seven film trailers utilize this technique, but each to a different way. This strategy is valuable because the audience watching the trailer can pick up on one of the people involved with the film and want to see it because of that person. Both *Carol* and *Juno* give special accreditation to the director and *Blue Valentine* accredits the main actor and actress. For example, a person who loves films from the Director Todd Haynes will be more enticed to see the movie *Carol* if they learn that he directed it. The company that produced the trailer for *Carol* recognized this and as a result emphasized on the fact that Todd Haynes is the director. The trailer does not use text, except to accredit awards or those involved and it states that Todd Haynes is the director twice in the 1 minute and 47 second long trailer “From Director Todd Haynes” at 26 seconds and “Directed by Todd Haynes” at 1 minute 39 seconds to remind the audience at the end of the trailer.

The trailer for *Juno* only uses text five times: for festival, director, and distributor recognition, for the film name, and for coming soon. 11 seconds into the trailer “from the director of Thank You For Smoking” appears on the screen with a white and orange striped backdrop. This is the first text scene that has a lot of emphasis placed on it. The fact that the trailer included this is important because it recognizes that people who like the film Thank You

For Smoking are more inclined to watch Juno once knowing this fact. It's also important to note that the trailer referenced the director through his past work, not through his actual name. The director, Jason Reitman, at the time was fairly unwell known and therefore using his past work would be more effective in the trailer.

The trailer for *Blue Valentine* puts more of the focus on the two main actors, Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams. The trailer focuses entirely on the two characters and each of the actors, who have been nominated in the past for an Oscar. The trailer used this to its advantage and named the actors as, "Academy Award Nominee Ryan Gosling", and "Academy Award Nominee Michelle Williams." This shows the audience that the actors have been nominated for prestigious awards in the past; the trailer accredits each actor to let the audience recognize who is in the film, and as a result targets an audience who likes the two main actors.

Independent films tend to be controversial in nature and many of the trailers are not afraid to highlight those issues and often may use them stylistically in the trailer. Stephen Garrett says that one of the techniques used for independent movie trailers is to embrace the weirdness of the film. The films *Carol* and *Little Miss Sunshine* both have storylines involving homosexuality. *Carol* is about two women who have fallen for each other and the trailer depicts their relationship. The entire trailer (including the scenes and dialogues) explains the relationship between the two women and a scene is shown of the two of them in bed together. In *Little Miss Sunshine* one of the main characters is depressed and attempted to commit suicide, which is a touchy topic itself, but the reason he tried to kill himself was because he loved a man who did not love him back. The trailer did not need to include this dialogue, but it did because it was not afraid to display its true content.

The trailer can utilize the ‘weirdness’ or ‘uniqueness’ of the independent film in ways other than revealing controversial content. Three examples are the trailers for *Clerks*, *Juno*, and *Tangerine*. *Clerks* is a film from 1994, but is shot in black and white. The trailer plays off of this by using vibrant colors to contrast against the black and white film, in a period when color films were coming out. Whenever the title *Clerks* was displayed in the trailer it would show up with each letter shown in a different color. One screen listed all the different music groups that were used in the film and each group was displayed in a different vibrant color.

In *Juno*, the title character is an average teenage girl who is a bit quirky and has a dry, sarcastic humor. Knowing this facet of the film is important when analyzing the trailer. The first close-up of a character you see is Juno wiping her mouth after just drinking out of a SunnyD container. When looking at this image it both plays to the serious (her eyes are glossy, showing sadness, and she looks exhausted) and comical aspect (the way she is wiping her mouth after drinking SunnyD, which itself is funny because that is not a typical “grown-up” drink).



The trailer proceeds then to Juno walking into a convenience store and looking at her positive pregnancy test. The trailer utilizes narration “Fox Searchlight Pictures presents a comedy about life and the bumps along the way...Juno.” It emphasizes the distribution company again and the fact that the movie is about a serious topic, but goes about the topic in a funny way. This parallels the way the trailer was cut; it shows that the film is about a serious subject and uses dialogue such as “I need to know it’s possible that two people can stay happy together forever,” “the best thing you can do is find a person who loves you for exactly what you are,” but brings a nice sense of comedy to the trailer as well with dialogue such as, “your little girlfriend gave me the stink eye in art class yesterday,” “Katrina’s not my girlfriend alright and I doubt that she gave you the stink eye that’s just the way her face looks, that’s just her face” and “that ain’t no Etch A Sketch this is one doodle that can’t be undid home skillet.” Every decision made in the trailer helps contribute to the ‘weirdness’ of the film, staying true to the content and feel of the film.

*Tangerine* is also an example of this and was one of the independent films analyzed in this research because two of the people interviewed mentioned it as a movie with an effective trailer. The film is about a girl looking for a pimp who cheated on her and the trailer adheres to the true nature of the film in every aspect. When you watch the trailer for *Tangerine* the film seems very comical based on the distinct voices of the main actresses, the music used, how the characters are introduced, the narration, and images used. Whenever text is displayed on screen bright colors are used (i.e. hot pink, lime green, aqua, and purple) with sparkles. The trailer focuses on the two main actresses and how they interact with each other. Lots of scenes that include physically (i.e. hitting) and verbally fighting and sass are used. The trailer is not afraid to play up the main actresses, using lines of dialogue like “yeah bitch like a real fish girl like vagina and everything” in the trailer.

Garrett talks about how the main actresses were the film's greatest elements and the trailer was cut in a way that emphasized the qualities that the actresses brought to the film. Garrett describes the trailer, "the two main actresses in the movie are really funny and really interesting and really charismatic. So what do you do with the trailer? You play them up as much as possible, they're your best assets. You want to play up the best assets of the movie period." When asked what trailers stood out to Millard, he mentioned that *Tangerine's* trailer stood out because "it spoke to how vibrant new that film was and I think it was pretty incredible." The trailer was not afraid to play up its biggest assets, which so happened to be the two main actresses and content that were both 'weird' and 'out there' in nature, and promote itself for the type of film it was, as a result it has proven to stand out among other trailers. The trailer for *Tangerine* also supports the general consensus when marketing any type of film, which is to pick out what is the film's best asset and market around that asset.

### **Conclusion**

So why even bother? As aforementioned, there are two full-length books devoted to trailers and none that analyze independent film trailers. As technology has continued to develop trailers have kept up with the trends and continue to become more and more popular. Independent films are becoming more and more prominent with the cost to entry continuing to decrease and film festivals remaining relevant. As a result, independent filmmakers must be able to effectively market their films in order to achieve a possibility of reaching a larger audience. Independent film trailers matter because independent filmmakers need to know how to cut through the noise.

Overall, when marketing any type of film the most important strategy is to advertise the film based on its greatest assets. Whether the film is an independent or mainstream film it is vital

to play up the parts of the film that make it unique. This is a recurring theme mentioned by many scholarly researchers and people working in the film industry. If a film does not appear to have much going for it, advertising something great can make the film look better than it is and draw in an audience for the film. This goes along with marketing any product; market the products best asset(s).

Garrett made a point to say that this is something important for any film, period, “as an indie movie or not an indie movie I think what you want to do is look at the kind of movie it is. Say this is the kind of movie this is, what is the best way to honor this type of movie.” A representative from a larger, Los-Angeles based trailer house, Ant Farm stated, “you have to find what is unique in each movie and figure out a way to highlight that and get the audience excited about it” (Wasko 198). Another related selling a film to selling strawberries, “if you want to sell a box of strawberries you make sure the big ones are on the top, the rotten ones are underneath. It was the same when they made a trailer: you pick only the scenes that’ll help you sell your picture” (Johnston 120). Take a film and play up the elements that are going to draw in an audience, play up what makes the film unique, play up the actors or the music, or the special effects, or the sound effects, or the storyline, whatever it is that the film has going for it that will effectively draw in an audience.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

### Edited Transcribed Interview with Robbie Mack from Filmack

Me: “My first question, knowing Filmack is one of the oldest companies in the business, can you tell me a little bit about the history of Filmack, the content it has produced, and how it has survived this long?”

Robbie: The company was started [in] 1919 by my grandfather. I’m third generation and [it] started with black and white, silent, nitrate film and over the last 40 years the film has gone from black and white to color, it added sound...now everything is basically done on digital, just like your cell phone takes pictures, you don’t even need to use a camera anymore. Same thing with filmmaking, you don’t use cameras you basically create everything from digital elements.

Me: Would you say that the way technology has changed has really changed the way Filmack runs and how you run it now from back when you started?

Robbie: Yes, its changed the whole business. Its changed my product as well as changing the product like *Star Wars*. You couldn’t have *Star Wars* back in the old days; there was no mechanism to get to the special effects and everything that *Star Wars* has on it. You could dream about it maybe, but you could never produce it. Today you could do both.

Me: Did you always know you wanted to get in the trailer business from working with your family or did that just decide [it] for you?

Robbie: Not really, I have business degrees and always liked creative art, but I was never good at it so I kind of learned on the job. I had my business background done [in] school and I learned the creative hands on, on the job training...so I’m very fortunate I was able to get my education [in] business and then learn the art of animation and the art of filmmaking on the job.

Me: Have you had other job experiences or once you started at Filmack you kind of knew that’s what you wanted to do then?

Robbie: Yeah, that’s basically been my whole career. I diversified, done other things. I’d been in sports educational companies and things like that from networking as I got more into the creative production and the producing end. So [I] do have other business interests, but you know I still love the art of film and you know it’s carried me through for the years.

Me: So I know that reading up on your company it seems that you produce more advertisements, not so much coming attraction trailers?

Robbie: That’s right. The coming attraction trailers, that are called the previews, are made by the studios themselves in Hollywood. We made everything else that’s up on the screen, whether it was a no smoking or no talking promotion or the concession stands or even running screen ads, which will help the operators gain income because you had captive audiences, so you could run a

ten or twenty or thirty second ad and that was effective advertising. So we did whatever the operator asked us to do and we did very little work with the studios per say.

Me: So how does that exactly work? Who did you really work with? Did you just mainly work with the theaters in the area?

Robbie: I work with all the theaters, whether they were large chains or whether they were international companies. There's organizations that did all that as well as corporations so it's a wide spectrum of people that if you look up a company called Screenvision they specifically will buy the screens from the circuit two minutes worth and then they'll go out and sell ads...So look up Screenvision right in New York and they do a lot of cinema advertising and a company like that that took care of things and we closed in on all the gaps on it. So to speak.

Me: So then just to talk a little bit about the economics of the trailers, how many would you say you produce in a typical year?

Robbie: Oh wow hundreds, I mean maybe even thousands during the heyday, but then things started calming down where things were done on digital. So, for example, they wouldn't have needed as many film prints because you just send them a flash drive or some kind of hard drive and the trailer would be on that and they would load it on the server and they wouldn't need the prints. The thing with film is you make the production and then you would ship the film prints and sometimes you would use 5 or 6 or 10, but that business kind of went down because now you send them a thumb drive and that works really well.

Me: How expensive is it to create a trailer and how do you then factor that into the price you charge for each of the trailers?

Robbie: Well the creative end is really a function of what's involved with it. Is it live action, is it animation, what exactly is involved...The simple ads were maybe just slides or images that someone would take and you would add a voice track...Other ones require live shooting, where you go out and actually shoot on location ... so they vary. Some trailers and advertisements are very simple, some are complex.

Me: So just a few prices to throw out there, just to get like a base mark?

Robbie: Some ads would sell for maybe \$900 dollars and some ads would sell for \$20,000 dollars.

Me: Oh wow.

Robbie: So yeah, you could get very specific and very expensive on some of this...How much special effects was needed, how much animation was needed, and you know they may say like "oh I have \$1,200 dollars to spend what can you make?" "Okay, well we can make you this, this, and this, but you can't have this and that." So you know it's kind of like a budget. They would have a budget and you would try to give them the best you could

Me: Speaking of working with the clients, what kind of specifications would they give you regarding the trailer? Would they tell you exactly what they wanted or kind of just throw out ideas or give you nothing?

Robbie: No both, that's a good question. They, some of them, would give us say, "make me a story board, give me some ideas" and other of them say, "listen I'm going to send you 6 or 7 images that I'm going to create, you put it together" and things like that.

Me: Creating them, how do you find it easier? Given not very much or given a lot?

Robbie: Well, it's hard to say. Sometimes it's easier if they do it and sometimes it's easier if they say, "here you do it Robbie"...It depends on the attitude and the personality of a client.

Me: With the clients that you've worked with, do you get a lot of the same clients continuously, you've worked with the same people for years, or is it a lot of newer clients?

Robbie: Yeah, well they vary. Some clients we were with, like AMC theaters and some of the other theater circuits, we would work for them and we were with AMC Theaters for over 30-40 years. Then some theaters were bought and sold, so really depends...then we dealt with a lot of individual theaters and some of the drive-ins that are ma and pa kind of operations. So it really varies. It's [an] interesting composition of who the clients are, the level of education, and the level of budgets, and everything.

Me: In your opinion, what do you think makes for a good movie trailer? What are the factors that matter most to you?

Robbie: Good question. Well certainly the creative. How creative are you and that's something that we would always help our clients do, is come up with something creative. Instead of saying you know visit x, y, and z...that's very bland and very simple and some people that's all they wanted and some people wanted more exciting information and more exciting graphics.

Me: What have a couple of your favorite projects been to work on?

Robbie: I think working with some of the larger circuits was very interesting because sometimes they would hire[an] ad agency and work with them and it got very complicated. A lot of pieces moving, which could be very exciting, but then again sometimes if you just work with one person and they say here do this or this and we send them proofs [and] they like it, we're done, it's a lot easier. But the bigger projects really were juicier, so to speak, and that was more rewarding, but it took a lot more time, a lot more patience to deal with a lot of people you know.

Me: I'm curious just to see your opinion on this, what do you think are the best, or your favorite, movie trailers? The top 3 or 4 that comes to your mind and what do you think makes them so effective?

Robbie: Well I'm partial to the "Let's All Go to the Lobby" trailer, which is one of Filmack's...and then we also have the one that's called the "Dancing Hotdog," which was filmed

in the 50s by simple animation and was very very very unusual...one of the most memorable segments of that trailer is the hotdog bun that would entice the hotdog to jump into it so it had a little sexual overtone, which was very interesting.

Me: Who places the trailer in the DVD's or on television or online? Do you, the company, place the trailer or does the distribution company usually place [it]?

Robbie: The distribution of the client does. So they figure out what venues they're going to go on. So some of our trailers have been on the theater screen, some have been on the Internet, and some of them have been in videos, and things like that. So that really is determined by the clients needs and the marketing and their budget [and] so on.

Me: My last question is, is there anything else you think I should know about movie trailers and/or the movie business industry?

Robbie: Just [that] technology has really changed, just like it changes all industries. You need less people, the quality of the work goes up, the cost to do it goes down because a lot of people today can do animation on an Apple computer, whereby years ago you couldn't even do it on an Apple computer, you had to use you know film animation and [an] artist and things like that. So you know technology has really helped lower the cost of entry, lower the cost of production, and gotten better creative values. So it's a pretty amazing feat to think about, that quality and everything can go up and the costs can go down...Lets say you had an old camera and today you use your iPhone. You capture 16 or 18 megapixels where before you had 6 or 7 and then and you know what'd you have to do, you had to download it to a chip...right now you just click it and send it to your friend...So same thing, you're getting better quality, it's faster better and it's cheap. It cost you nothing to send a picture to someone. But that's a good analogy I think and the same thing with a message you know versus typing out a letter on paper with a typewriter ,putting it in an envelope, stamp, mail it, three days later they get it. Today, you can just send an email, same analogy.

Edited Transcribed Interview with Stephen Garrett from Jump Cut Creative

Me: My first question [is] when was the company founded and what led you to Jump Cut Creative?

Stephen: Well you know, we started Jump Cut in 2012...it actually was an offshoot of another company I was involved in called Kinetic, which I had cofounded with a women named Kristie Wilson in 2002...So on the one hand Jump Cut has been around for you know about 3 years now and on the other hand I've been doing this for almost 20 years because before Kinetic I was cutting indie trailers in Los Angeles in the late 90s.

Me: How many trailers would you say that Jump Cut produces in a typical year?

Stephen: In a typical year we end up doing something, we do a fair amount, we do like 40-45 trailers a year. It's myself and my partner David Klagsbrun. He does about 20 and I do about 20...on top of that we also do adaptations of trailers...but in terms of original trailers, from scratch, I would say between 40-45.

Me: Do you mainly just edit it, like you said you each do about 20, so you edit it then on your own and then do you guys collaborate over it?

Stephen: Yeah...I think, you know, a movie will come in and we'll talk about it and we'll say first of all you know who's the most passionate about it...What we also try to do is go to film festivals, like David's at Sundance right now, I'm going to Berlin in 2 weeks...I'm going to go to Cannes in May, and then I'll also go to Toronto in September...we do actually do some work for the New York Film Festival. We do the trailer for the New York Film Festival that plays before all the movies. Yeah, so that allows us to also go to the New York Film Festival...Anyway, there are a bunch of opportunities to see movies before they get distributors and so what we try to do is just be up on everything as much as possible. It's impossible to be up on everything, but we try to be at least cognitive of what movies are out there and what is getting good reception so we can see it ourselves before a distributor picks it up and then if it's something we really love then we'll reach out to a distributor...We also have relationships with clients so it's not unusual for certain clients to call up and say, "could you make a trailer"...and then there are other times when we just get cold calls from filmmakers that don't even have a distributor, are going to a festival, and making a trailer...We try to be as budget friendly as possible, but also be cognitive of the fact that we're running a small company. We have about 6-7 people on staff on payroll and rent to pay...We do try to be [as] charitable whenever possible because ultimately we also want to support movies that are really great, that are challenging, that are not easy to market, and we want to try to do as much as we can.

Me: How expensive is it to create a trailer and then how do you factor that cost into the price you do charge the companies?

Stephen: ...Let me put it this way, when we when we talk about a budget for a trailer, what we're talking about is the kind of expense in front of a computer editing to put it together. There aren't really a lot of hard costs like there certainly were in the past...Basically, we just create a

trailer output and send it to the filmmakers and then we're done... There've been times when people have really low budgets and will say we need a festival trailer. For example, "we need something that the festival can put online so it's only ever going to play online, so can you just mix it in-house." I mean we're not a mixing facility, we don't have that sound studio for mixing your sound studio, but we can do basic things... We'll get a copy of the film that actually looks great, [that's] been color corrected and holds up in HD and we edit in HD... Then we do a basic mix and then they show it online so that it actually doesn't need to make a DCP to play it in theaters... Basically, there are no occurring hard costs at that point, it's really just whatever we charge for our time. The market rates for that varies... We're in a small pond you know when you talk about indie filmmakers and budgets for promotion. If you were working in a studio, rather if you were recording studio work, the budgets are enormous. I mean, but again, fundamentally the hard costs are not what they used to be... What you're basically paying for is creativity. You're paying for somebody's time and experience.

Me: You'd say you very much so tailor the costs per trailer basis?

Stephen: Yeah, I mean it's hard to really give you a specific number because we also have repeat clients, regular clients who come to us and say, "can you give us a bulk rate because we'll promise to give you a certain amount of jobs a year and in return can you lower your usual per unit cost." It's just like any business, but I would say that the ballpark is usually between \$10,000 and \$15,000 depending on the type of film, depending on the number of revisions, depending on the type of finish they want, depending on what kind of graphics they need, whether or not there's going to be music licensed as well...

Me: When working with different clients, what kind of specifications do they give you regarding the trailer or do they just tell you to do whatever you want most of the time?

Stephen: You know, it varies, like the budget, it varies. I feel like I'm not giving you any specific answer, there really isn't a specific answer... But anyways I would say, let's say for a regular client, we'll start with a regular client. Usually, they are comfortable enough with us and we've turned in enough work that they have liked and responded to... There's a certain amount of trust, you build a certain amount of trust and familiarity... If it's a repeat client they'll say, "here's a movie, take a crack at [it.] It's yours to see what you think... to see what you come up with. Then the other extreme is a first time client that doesn't know us from past and will ask us, "can you take a look at the movie? Maybe we can have a creative call after that? We can figure out what is the approach which we would take"... The extreme of that is when you have a client who says, "can you put together a paper cut," which is basically when you write down the dialogue that you're going to use in the trailer. You kind of go through and pull which you think are the most interesting lines of dialogue and then you put it together on a piece of paper and intersperse copy and graphic art copy... but I'm always wary of that because it always changes. The last time I did it, because we don't really do it that often, the last time I did it I was laughing with my partner David... Basically, I'm doing a paper cut for like a 4 minute trailer, there's so much dialogue in here and I know we're not going to use that much, but I also wanted to show the client the different options that we have... It really just depends. There's also times where a repeat client will say, "hey we have a touchy movie, maybe it's a political documentary... we'll have a creative notation that says stay away from that material we don't want to see x, y, or z, but we do

want to see a, b, and c. That can be helpful...But really just depends...There's a movie we were working on, an eco doc, that was also like a nature doc, that was also political. We cut it one-way and they said, "oh there's too much politics, it needs to be a nature doc." So we cut it so it was more of a nature doc. Then they said, "Now there's no politics. We asked you to go the other way, now I want you to sprinkle some of the stuff that you put in there." So the third set was something like the goldilocks thing, it's too cold, it's too hot, and now it's just right. That's sometimes the journey you have to take with the client, whether it's the first time or a regular client because of the type of movie that requires it...If I could just step back and talk about trailers in general. Trailers are fundamentally 2-2 and ½ minutes long. So something that works in a movie might never work at all in a trailer because the size of a trailer is so compacted, it's so intense, it's a concentrated version of itself...It can work even better in a trailer. That's also why sometimes you'll find people saying, "Oh I have a bunch of outtakes that I think would be great for that trailer that just didn't work for the feature." There are two reasons why you see that happening. You'll see it in comedies a lot actually and the more realistic reason pertains to the Hollywood movies, which is that trailers are cut while the movie is still being cut. The person cutting the trailer is cutting the trailer a year out or 9 months out from the movie's release so they're working on a rough cut of the film...That's also why you'll sometimes see different takes of a line...I don't have that opportunity. When you're working on indie trailers because usually what happens is we're working not with production companies we're working with distribution companies...What you're getting is the actual pocket film and what you're working with, what you put in the trailer, is literally everything that's in the movie.

Me: So you work mainly with the finished film?

Stephen: I would say 90% of the time we do...It's dishonest if you use too much material that's not in the movie at all in order to promote the movie. I think it's something you have to be weary of.

Me: How would you say working on an independent movie trailer differs from working on other trailers, in your opinion?

Stephen: Working on a big studio trailer?

Me: Yeah.

Stephen: I can really only speculate because it's been going on 20 years since I've actually been at a company that worked on big studio stuff...Certainly I had exposure to it when I had a job as an assistant...So that said, I also kind of feel like things probably haven't changed that much. So if I could just wildly speculate, I'll give you an educated guess. You mentioned before how many trailers do we do, we do between 40-45 trailers, which is really great because there's a lot of variety and that also means there's not a lot of revisions, and you get through a trailer campaign pretty quickly. You know there's one trailer, they hire you, they send you the movie, and usually in about 4-6 weeks you're close to being done...You usually work on maybe 2-3 other trailers at the same time...Basically, David and I are cutting a trailer every other week. So at a bigger place that does studio stuff, of course the pay is much better, but it takes much more because they want more from you...They might be doing what's called double or triple vendorin, where they hire

you, or I mean they hire your company, and then they hire maybe one or two other companies to do that same trailer. So they double vendor or they triple vendor where they use multiple vendors and what they might do is hire you to cut one trailer and then they'll look at a trailer that somebody else did and then they might say, "Oh we really like the way you started the trailer, but we really liked the middle part of their trailer, and then we also have this idea of how to end the trailer and so let's just have them all together." That's what's called 'frankeinsteining' the trailer and that happens quite a bit or it certainly has happened historically quite a bit... But the studios will end up spending a lot of money double or triple vendoring, especially if it's a big summer movie... Anyway, that said you could be working 9 months out of the release date so you could be working on that trailer for the course of 6 months and it's not uncommon for you to go from version 12 to version 20 to version 25 to version 30, and as I mentioned before, we usually lock numbers at 5 or 6. Also, there's fewer, it's a smaller pond, you're working with smaller budgets, so you're working with smaller companies. So what that means is there are literally one or two more people you need to talk to and that's it... In the world that I'm working in, I'm my own graphics person... I usually write my own copy, I'm my own creative director and then I just talk to the marketing person at the company... Also, the thing with studios, the thing they do, is they also test market. They'll take a trailer into a supermarket... they'll have it set up on a laptop, they'll ask people that come by to look at the trailer, fill out a form... Based on those notes, they send those notes to the trailer editor and to the producer and to the marketing people at Warner Bros. and everyone looks through them and says, "Okay well you know this opening was working really well. We need to work on the middle part."... So you're getting notes from the public, as well as notes from experienced marketing people. But at a certain point, I have to say from a personal point of view, let me put it this way, this was a marketing person who said this, this is a marketing person who works mostly in the indie world, but at a higher level, where they have sort of bigger budgets... He said, "if we're at version 10 it's your fault," but he's like, "If we're at version 20, it's our fault." Which is to say if we're at version 10 the vendor is not really hitting the mark, but if you're suddenly at version 20, then that means the marketing people that hired you don't know what they want, and that can be very frustrating. If you're working with a client who doesn't really know what he or she wants, or doesn't trust their instinct, or just doesn't know what's best for the movie, or second guesses themselves, then it really starts to flail and from a creative point of view you start to get less invested because you're not as passionate about it if they won't take your ideas or try to develop them... For my own point of view, there are many reasons why I'm not working in studio stuff, partly because of geography, I just love New York and I want to live in New York and it's very difficult to work on studio stuff if you're living in New York. Partly, it's because of the type of movie. I just enjoy indie movies a lot more than the studio stuff. Studio stuffs okay... The reason I like working on indie stuff is [the] movies are a little more interesting and the creative people that pick it up are a little more willing to try something different or weird or interesting so that you have a lot more freedom as a indie trailer editor to do something totally strange because it might also represent the movie which might be totally strange... Don't get me wrong, the people that cut studio trailers are amazing at their jobs, they are just amazing. I would say some of the best editors out there. Doing really interesting stuff, really creative stuff, as much as they are allowed to. I sometimes feel like I'm looking at the work of somebody who's biting the rain like, "Grrr, let me run free, let me do something creative"... I don't blame them, there's so much money involved... But in a smaller pond, which we work in for indie movies, it's like every movie is weird in some way and every movie in your genre mash up and every movie is trying to do

something different so it's fun actually. If anything, it challenges [you] to take that weird movie and try and make it look as though it's more mainstream or make it look like the type of movie you're used to seeing...without compromising the movie too much because you do want to make it marketable to audiences.

Me: What qualities would you find to be really important in making an indie movie trailer, like what are the things that you usually want to show or focus on in an indie trailer?

Stephen: As an indie movie or not an indie movie I think what you want to do is look at the kind of movie it is. Say this is the kind of movie this is, what is the best way to honor this type of movie, what is the best way to represent this kind of movie...The thing about Hollywood movies is that they have stars and they have a certain recipe in terms of what people expect in terms of explosions or whatever. *The Fast and Furious*, for example, you're going to put in Vin Diesel...you know you're going to put in the Rock, you're going to put in some amazing cars...you're going to have great, great music. There's a recipe, those are the elements that they are selling, those are the elements that you want to market. So the main thing is you want to look at the movie you have, whether it's a \$200 million movie or...lets look at *Tangerine*... You look at a movie like that and the best part of that movie is the dialogue and the outrageous stars, you know the two main actresses in the movie are really funny and really interesting and really charismatic. So what do you do with the trailer? You play them up as much as possible, they're your best asset. You want to play up the best assets of the movie period...Let me put it this way, if it's a weird movie that's hard to market and it gets picked up by a distributor and that distributor would not have picked up that movie if that distributor was afraid to market that kind of movie. A fearless experimental movie is probably going to have a fearless experimental distributor, if it's going to get picked up, and that kind of distributor is going to have a marketing team that hopefully is going to be okay with you guys doing something fearless and experimental...Let me put it this way, a distributor wouldn't pick up a movie if they didn't think that they couldn't find the audience for that movie so they could recoup the money that they're going to invest into selling the movie to the people. So that's a matter of how can we best track the people who buy tickets to go see this movie...There's definitely been times where I try to make a very arty movie look a little more accessible, a little more conventional, in order to get people to come to the movie. And sometimes the movie is so wild and so genre based, or so out there, that there's no way to make it, you just kind of embrace it's assets, again embrace the weirdness and just make a really weird trailer and to a certain extent that's probably going to play better anyway. So there was a great trailer we did that we were very happy to be in development with called *Queen of Earth*...When *Queen of Earth* came around the distributor was a lot more open to us doing something weird because the stakes were low, the distributor picked it up for a small amount of money...I think they recognized the audience for this movie is going to be small anyways...If you go look at the trailer it's really funny and it's really distinct and I think it really stands apart. It embraces the weirdness of the movie in an honest way I think...as well as an homage to the kinds of 70s movies that this movie was inspired by. So it really works on a lot of different levels and it's also a lot of fun...We were very honored at the end of the year, there were a bunch of different top ten lists that blogs would have about trailers of the year, and you'd see like *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and then *Queen of Earth* and we're like, "What are we doing on that list, that's hilarious," but it's one way to kind of cut through the noise, especially because it's a super low budget movie with a small

distributor... You want to be distinct, you want to cut through the noise, but you also want to honor the movie, make a trailer that really represents the movie as well as possible. I think sometimes if you do something generic and safe it's going to be forgotten.

Me: Many independent films aren't really shown in movie theaters, or you know they're shown at film festivals, or some are shown in movie theaters, or some just go straight to video-on-demand or Netflix, do you think that that affects the role of the movie trailer?

Stephen: Oh yeah that's interesting. Movie trailers when I started out only played in movie theaters and then they were this curiosity that was thrown onto DVD's that were just started being made. DVD's just started coming out in 98 and so as an extra supplemental material which you could put on there that you couldn't necessarily on VHS tapes, they threw on trailers occasionally... But anyway so that kind of thing started happening with DVD's, but at that point you didn't see trailers on the Internet, so if you wanted to see a trailer for a movie you had to buy a ticket, go to the movie theater to see the trailer and after that happened the trailers just disappeared. Then they became this kind of trivia that you would find on criteria DVD's... DVD's were really the first time that you could really easy look at trailers, that at that point you might have only remembered or people had just kind of talked about. So they were much more ephemeral back then... Whenever YouTube started, that's where it really splintered and that's where... trailers suddenly never went away, in fact after they've went away they were brought back and put online... So there was this really interesting crowd source development where regular people were just putting up their favorite trailers online... the point being, in this day in age if you make a trailer for movies it has a very long tail, it doesn't ever disappear. Chances are you could google any number of trailers that I've worked on, any going back 20 years, and you could probably find them. They may not be in great condition, the older ones especially... but they do exist, they're out there and they won't go away or at least it feels like they won't go away. So in defense you get more bang for your buck... Whatever you end up making is going to be trapped and is going to echo out for decades for whatever movie you made and is going to represent whatever movie you made and will continue to market whatever movie you made... The role that the trailer has taken over the past 10 years has suddenly become much larger than it did before and you know as much as we may rush to get a trailer done part of me in the back of my head says it wouldn't even matter, as long as we get the trailer done this movie will live out there for the next 10 or 20 years and if it's something you're going to watch on Netflix you're going to google the trailer and you're going to find my trailer on YouTube. So it's kind of interesting, these trailers I feel like are kind of like ghosts or zombies, they'll live long after the movie.

Edited Transcribed Interview with RJ Millard from Obscured Pictures

Me: So my first question is how many marketing campaigns would you say that you work on per year for independent films?

RJ: ...We do a combination of things. We do marketing, publicity, sales, [and] we do some distribution. So in total we probably work on 40 films a year.

Me: Oh awesome okay and could you describe the typical process that you follow when developing marketing or publicity plans for the independent films?

RJ: Well sure. We get hired by sometimes the filmmakers directly and sometimes we get hired directly by the distributor, so it depends on what mode we're in...with the project. Either way the first steps you'd want to take are you need to start assembling your materials and your communication with the filmmaker...We may also do promotional materials, whether it's a hat or a t-shirt or scarves or a baseball cap or postcards and that kind of thing we'll work with our vendors to develop those materials.

Me: Oh great and what would you say has been the most successful marketing campaign that you've worked on and what would have made it so successful?

RJ: I mean there's really, there's a lot of different ways to judge success. Sometimes it's the amount of attention that the ability of sales [produces] and sometimes it's based on the fact that you're going into a theatrical market place and people actually go out and see the film.

Me: Yeah, definitely. And do you guys ever work with any of the trailer companies, I know you had mentioned JumpCut Creative, do you ever work besides these companies?

RJ: What do you mean work beside them?

Me: When creating marketing material do you guys ever work together to kind of make a cohesive trailer with the publicity and sales?

RJ: Yeah, I mean everybody does work with their trailer vendors pretty closely. Sometimes it's the filmmaker or sometimes it's directly through the trailer vendors. So it depends on the project and the budget and all those things.

Me: Okay and what, in your opinion, this is just a general question, makes for a good movie trailer?

RJ: Well the biggest thing I think is to sell the movie as best as the movie can be and to sell it to the audience that you're focused on without that you're really sort of mis-marketing and [that] could lead to not so great results.

Me: Okay, and are there any trailers that stand out to you? Any in general, the first ones that pop into your head that you think have done this effectively?

RJ: Well I mean the films that I haven't worked on, we didn't work on it, I think the trailer for Tangerine was just sort of it spoke to how vibrant new that film was and I think it was pretty incredible and if you look at something that's more commercial ...it's not independent but you know the trailer for Spy where she's just immediately a train wreck? Like two great examples of a studio company that actually worked really sort of hitting that funny bone.

Me: Awesome and when working with clients for different films what kind of specifications do they give you in regards to the marketing and publicity and sales or do you just start from scratch?

RJ: A lot of times we're helping to determine what the mindset is because we work with a lot of first time filmmakers or second or even third time filmmakers and they're coming to us to really look for how to find an audience for their film, how to break out at a film festival so we usually try define what those goals [are]...cause a lot of times filmmakers have, they don't understand what the realities are of different situations and how this part of business works, so there's a little bit of education that goes on both fronts, in term of what they want and what's achievable at the market or festival that they're actually competing in or screening at.

Me: So how do a lot of these independent first timers or producers hear about Obscured Pictures or chose Obscured Pictures to promote their movies?

RJ: Well I speak at a lot of different panels and discussions and we attend festivals so we're always out their meeting with filmmakers and talking to other people, but then there's also I guess a lot of word of mouth. Beyond that I actually don't know how people find us.

Me: Okay, but you would say probably word of mouth is one of the major ways?

RJ: Yeah.

Me: ...I only have a couple more questions. What is most challenging when working on a marketing campaign for an indie film?

RJ: ...The biggest thing for independent films is you always have to find a way to distinguish it from the next...even at a festival environment, where the playing field has already been whittled down to 150 films...if you do the math you can really only hit like 40 of those films if you saw every single screening opportunity possible. So to get press and distributors and the public to focus in on and to go to your screen, that's actually a lot harder than one would think. So it's finding that narrative hook, that visual style, and the calling card of the film that 's going to draw people in. So I think that's the biggest thing that we always struggle with or not struggle with, but we always focus on is finding those key moments and those key images that are going to draw in the audience that are going to appreciate and enjoy the film the most.

Me: ... [is] there anything else that you think I should know about movie trailers or the movie business industry as a whole?

RJ: That's such a broad question; I don't even know where to start.

Me: ...Essentially, is there anything I haven't really touched on that you think would be beneficial information in regards to independent movie trailers or the marketing for independent films?

RJ: I mean the basics are you should always keep your trailer under 2 minutes ideally; a 3-minute trailer is commercially worthless. No theater in America is going to put up a 3-minute trailer unless you're paying to put it up in theaters and I always tell filmmakers to avoid doing something that is over 2 minutes because it's so much easier to both place...but also just in terms of how much you want to give away of your movie. There's really no need to, you just need to get a few narrative beats in there.

## Edited Transcribed Interview with Meggie Cramer from the Kindling Group

Me: I know that you work for the Kindling group currently and my project as I had stated is on Independent movie trailers and marketing.

Me: So what is your exact role for the Kindling Group?

Meggie: So I am the associate director here, we're a small team, there are about six of us. Essentially, my role is kind of a hybrid, so on one hand I am the keeper of a lot of the organizational priorities, so things like the board of directors, organizational fundraising, strategic planning, kind of working to create a sustainable organization outside of just successful films, but then I also work as kind of the condiment between some of the filmmakers and the organization determining the kind of priorities... When we get a new project it starts with me and the executive director working together to create things like the budget and the team and I usually hand it off to a line producer, one of our staff producers and then that's kind of like my umbrella role. And then I'm kind of the strategist when it comes to how our projects interact with us as an organization.

Me: Okay, cool. So do you work on or work with others for any of the marketing?

Meggie: Definitely...Every film we take on has some social impact or engagement campaign behind it so often times the lines between marketing and engagement can blur. So in terms of marketing as an organization I work really closely with our staff producer who also is kind of an honorary director of engagement because she has an incredible amount of experience with marketing in terms of issues. She worked on the Obama campaign for his reelection in 2012 crafting the tone of voice that we work with when depending who we are speaking to whether its funders, audience, influencers in the issue that we are trying to communicate so there's a little bit of, there's a little bit of crossover in what we do in terms of what is pure marketing and what is actually qualified as engagement. It's a bit of a Venn diagram because there are certain things that we market that are just for Kindling Group that's about what we do as an organization and our capacity as an organization and then there's also marketing and engagement for our films and our projects. So there's a little of a dual focus and we are all very collaborative and we are all very involved in all aspects of it, but the lines do blur in terms of what is marketing a project and what is serving the larger impact in engagement roles.

Me: Okay so when you do market these kind of films with the social issues what is probably the most important thing to market? Do you mainly focus on these issues to market to audiences?

Meggie: I think it depends. So we are firm believers in what we refer to as issue funding. There's a significant amount of saturation when it comes to filming to funding films, there in terms of just supply and demand. There are a lot of people who fancy themselves filmmakers and so there are more and more people who fancy themselves filmmakers and fewer and fewer traditional filmmaking funders. So on kind of large scale projects the projects that are studio based that's not much of an issue because you're whole project is funded by a studio or equity investment, your whole budget is covered, you're not scrapping around for money. In terms of documentary, since we focus on films that have some sort of prominent issue within them, we have kind of

again dual model. We reach out to stakeholders that are actually involved and active in the issues themselves and we also reach out to the more traditional fundraising and funders like Sundance and HBO, those types of places. We are also firm believers in the number one thing and this honestly could go for most documentary films. The number one thing, in terms of marketing and in terms of creating a film that's going to be seen, is audience building. We refer to it as building the choir to open the gates of heaven, that especially when it comes to documentary film there is a really, there's a surprising audience for it, a lot of people consume nonfiction media. We are also strong believers that doc doesn't have to be a 90 minute feature length theatrical style film. So how you're planning on distributing the film also will impact your marketing and will impact the tools that you use to market smaller films. Obviously since we are always going out for funding a trailer is often the first thing you create, which is backwards for a lot of other films, especially large studio films where you make the movie and then you make a trailer to try to sell it or to try to market it to your audience. Whereas in doc filmmaking, especially in order to even get any funding, you have to have to what we refer to as lift. And a lift is a trailer or a sizzle reel or something that shows the tangible visible product you are trying to create. It's what kind of makes doc trailers a little bit unique, is that we make them backwards, is that we create a trailer to sell the feature length even if the feature length film hasn't been made yet. But it can also be really draining because you have to spend twenty five thousand dollars to make a two-minute trailer in order to try [to] go out and get the two hundred and fifty thousand to finish the film. So even if you never get that money you've already thrown in twenty five grand and its why if you Google doc trailers there are a lot of examples of trailers that there's no film later, it'll have a release date as 2019 because they have a trailer, but that's to go out to funders to go out to people who might want to invest in the film to put on Kickstarter. That's been another really big thing, you have to have some sort of trailer to go on Kickstarter ...it's no longer the kind of traditional old school model where you write a paper proposal, get your money, make the movie, and then make a trailer. So that makes doc filmmaking a little bit unique in terms of the role of a trailer and the role of marketing before you've made a movie. That's kind of again a unique aspect of issue area films and of doc films, that we have a tendency to create these kind of lifts, these trailers, these peripheral marketing materials before the films ever finished because we need to try to find a way to make the money to get the film finished. Some doc filmmakers don't follow that, whether they're working on a sensitive subject and they don't want anything to become public, whether they're working on something where there anonymity and their identities need to be kind of protected...but yea it's the role of that kind of short form trailer in doc filmmaking has a lot to do with funding, which is different than the traditional trailer model which is for ticket sales, audience, audience engagement, and awareness. It does serve that purpose later you know there's just as much interest in a trailer for some of the bigger docs from some of the bigger filmmakers Michael Moore, Werner Herzog, Morgan Spurlock; where they have their name on a trailer makes people want to watch [the film], which is what a trailer is supposed to do. In terms of the larger percentage of doc filmmakers, your trailer almost serves as more of a teaser that you are creating. The kind of content interests people enough to not just watch your film, which again is the kind of traditional point of a trailer, but to give you money.

Me: When you say that they create it before a film do you mean before the film's finished or before they even start the film?

Meggie: It depends. So a kind of good example is we have a film right now which we're still claiming is in development. We are shooting, we are kind of picking up content where we can, we are starting the relationships that will help fund the film in the future, but by no means do we have [a] storyboarded. We don't necessarily know what the arc is going to look like, we don't know how much one subject is going to be in the film versus another subject, it's also a unique film because there's probably going to be some animation in it so we don't know how much of it is going to be animated and how much is going to be straight you know film, but in that same breath we have a trailer, a confidential trailer, that we have to include in any grant proposal. The film is not finished, the film is far from finished, we have started the film, but we don't necessarily know what the film is going to be exactly yet...some people will make what's called a sizzle reel. A sizzle reel is a little bit different than a trailer because a sizzle reel shouldn't hold a full feature, but it's almost like if you're...working with an interior designer they give you what's called a mood board. It's going to be images of similar furniture, of similar plants, of similar paint colors and start to coalesce the ideas and the pieces that are going to go into the final room. A sizzle reel is similar in that way where you're going to pull footage from similar kinds of films that have the kind of style you like, that have a feel of what you are trying to get across, but might not necessarily have your actual footage in it yet. A trailer should be your footage, which is why it's a weird kind of place for doc filmmakers...it's you know, it's a snake eating its tail...There are some filmmakers who can get away without it, who you know are walking into a room or who are independently wealthy and are making their movies based on their own bank account, but for us, we start to make a trailer when we have about 15-20% of our footage shoot...you can also create sometimes, and this is both documentary and fiction films...a treatment, so often times you create a treatment before you ever create a trailer. In some instances you can get away with going to funders without a trailer if you have a really solid treatment. So visual treatment is almost like, we usually work with a writer and a designer who make something really good to go to sell on a very low level. It can be like a PowerPoint presentation with images, but on a really high level. We work with a designer or writer for two or three days and they do a huge image pull and they sort through hundreds of images...So like Kellogg's, and you're all given the same general script of what it is, but three directors will make a treatment that looks a little bit different, has a little bit of a different look and feel, so doc filmmakers don't do treatments as much [as] we do trailers. We make trailers first, it also helps to weed out certain relationships, both in a good way and a bad way. Sometimes we use an editor that you think is going to direct your full feature and then they do a two and a half minute trailer and you didn't really like working with them and you pay them and you don't talk to them again. Or you work with a line producer to have them budget out a trailer and you think you're just going to hire them for two days to do this budget to get the trailer done and then you realize that you really like them and they're great and they end up producing the rest of your film. So trailers for doc filmmakers can also be a relationship building opportunity. Again, less so then big studio films, where they have a you know a hive of editors who can turn out six different trailers in six days. You know money is a big thing even with marketing.

Me: So then when making those trailers, I guess to get funding, you use that 15-20% footage that you try to have already?

Meggie: We can also use found footage. There's a really wonderful piece of law called Fair Use that doc filmmakers exploit pretty significantly that essentially says anything that has been

broadcast before, so like clips from CNN, if you're taking it and making something new with it, it's fair use... There are some boundaries to Fair Use, but say Fox news did a segment on something that would be relevant to the film, I can pull 10 seconds of that and put it in my trailer without paying Fox 8 grand a second for licensing, and so it helps fill in the gaps where maybe we haven't filmed yet... you know it's not necessarily applauded, you don't particularly want to rip significant amount of footage that you haven't shot yourself, but at the same time doc filmmakers especially are all relatively good at finding things that they can use for free.

Me: Do you think that documentary films kind of work in similar ways as independent films that aren't documentary to help market their films?

Meggie: I think it depends. So independent, the term independent film, is a very broad term. You know films that come out of Weinstein or some HBO filmmaker calls themselves independent filmmakers and it's not necessarily a misnomer because at it's core independent just means without the support of a studio, that's all it really means. When you say you're an independent filmmaker, it means that 9 times out of 10 you don't have some kind of first look deal with Sony, Fox, Warner Bros., you know that you are working without that support... at the end of the day a doc trailer, yes still absolutely is to develop interest and to develop an audience and to develop buzz and to develop awareness around the film, but independent film fiction trailers usually have the assumption that, and this is again broad, that they have a distribution deal, that you aren't usually going to create a trailer until you have some guarantee that your film is going to end up in the theatre somewhere because you don't need a trailer otherwise. You don't unless you are again trying to go out for distributors and you want to show them "look I've got a great 35 second trailer that I've already cut myself. Look at how cool it makes the film look you really want to buy it."... At the end of the day, trailers are all very fiscally motivated because even if you say "Oh well I'm making a trailer because I want an audience," you want an audience because you want ticket sales. So no one creates a trailer just you know for the pure visibility, the visibility at the end of the day is for sales. So independent films, how you can tell the difference, this is again kind of a strange like inside baseball piece type of knowledge, if you see logos in a trailer it has a distribution deal. So if you see Magnolia Films, if you see any major logos where if you went and googled it and it has a website and it has other films on that website then that film has a distribution deal... so if your film has been signed to a distributor, the distributor's logo is in your trailer. If it doesn't, if you don't have a distribution deal, you can put your production company's logo on it... The goal of trailers, regardless of the size of the budget of the film, are to somehow recoup costs. It's a marketing strategy, but the end game of marketing is to make money, which is why doc trailers are often different because we are in it yea to make money, but it's not usually our ticket sales that we are trying to get, it's literally the front end money to make the movie. So independent film trailers are an interesting beast because you do get filmmakers now who maybe use it for festivals, who want to use it who maybe don't have a finished film yet and are using a trailer to apply to festivals or to interest broadcasters... One Hundred percent of the time if you see an independent film trailer on television they have a distribution deal, that's a given. No independent filmmaker has enough money to buy ad time without a distributor. So that's why you don't see a lot of doc trailers on television, it means we don't have the distribution deals that want to put that kind of ad buy behind us. Again, the three filmmakers that probably would, Michael Moore, Werner Herzog, and Morgan Spurlock. Again, independent is a broad term for a filmmaker that isn't married to one studio so independent

trailers are very similar, there's not really such thing as a quote unquote independent trailer, but an independent filmmaker who then got a deal with a studio will usually put out a trailer for their film.

Me: What would you say has been the most successful campaign you've worked on for a documentary film?

Meggie: It depends. I would say that in terms of backend it would probably be the film I worked on called Citizen Koch, mostly because...we did a really targeted marketing campaign because the film lost 150 thousand dollars of funding because of a politically motivated decision. So we, at that point the film had already been finished, so we were trying to recoup our costs and actually pay people so we did a very targeted, very successful social media and Kickstarter campaign that got us our funding through crowdsourcing, which was great and very fun and taught me the art of targeting people on Twitter...the filmmakers were very terrified of Twitter so I got to be the instigator on Twitter. Learning the analytics behind social media was really fun in that way when your supporters are most active when they're tweeting, who they're tweeting at, things like that. In terms of this current role, we have had a lot of really great luck with our film Radical Grace. Luck is the wrong word because there has been a lot of really significant work behind it. There's been a lot of very, again it goes back to the targeted research and finding who your core audience is going to be and really digging in deep with them and getting traction with the people you know are going to be interested in it...So progressive Catholics, feminists, intersectional feminists, feminists who are interested in the intersection of faith and women's rights, so there's a whole sub section of people who are already going to be interested in the film. So how do you use them as champions, you know and to be in some way free marketing. How do you pick those people and hope that it catapults you to a larger audience. We have had some really great luck with it. We've done a lot of research, again you have to dig pretty deeply into who your unique audience is and then start to look at concentric circles around them and where do things overlap. With an independent feature that's a fiction film that's a little bit different...the kind of marketing around docs can also be issue specific, but at the same time a good example of a really fantastic documentary that didn't have much of a marketing campaign behind it and doesn't have a lot of awareness is Virunga. [It's] a Netflix film about gorillas that was nominated for an Oscar, it was Netflix's first documentary...they didn't really put a lot of muscle behind it in terms of money to market it...great film, interesting subject rather...well shot, well received, but I think if you were to ask 15 people on the street if they'd heard of Virunga they'd probably say no. Whereas Michael Moore's newest movie maybe not necessarily his best and you know a kind of vague topic...but [it] has a marketing budget behind it where you're seeing trailers for it on NBC or CBS...because any trailer that's going to be broadcast on TV, they do a lot of advertising and audience research. You're going to see a lot of trailers for animated films on Lifetime because Lifetime is dominated by women with children who are affluent enough to bring their kids to movies. You're going to see a lot of advertising, a lot of trailers for things like *Spotlight* on Bravo because Bravo has an extremely affluent viewer base that is also predominantly left leaning liberals and they are going to want to go see a movie about the fallings of the catholic church and how journalism saved the day. You're going to see a lot of trailers for *Batman vs. Superman* on CBS during the *Big Bang Theory*. A.) Because Marvel has enough money to pay for that and B.) It's a much more kind of broad and shallow viewer base...You're not going to see independent trailers, even if there's a distribution deal, on CBS

because that's not the market for it. You're going to see it again [on] Bravo...TV will play certain independent trailers, but 90% of them, if you look, are going to be part of one of Viacom's sister companies because the ad dollars are going to go a lot farther because they're owned by the same company...*Deadpool* just came out and has an insane marketing buy because it was a comic movie with Ryan Reynolds, although he has proved he cannot open a movie until this one, but that movie also was on a lot of different channels because it had a lot of ad buy, but it also had a lot of very strange product placements. We use Premier, which is our editing software and part of the Adobe Suite, so anytime I would go on Adobe.com I would be forced to watch a trailer for *Deadpool* before I could do anything because they edited it on Premier. Trailers can also be giant ad commercials when they are embedded...trailers are a tool, but you have to make a trailer based on what tool you want. In terms of independent film, it really depends on the money behind it and how much disposable money you have. A trailer is a requirement for a doc to get made, a trailer is less of a requirement for an independent feature fiction film to get made, instead it's a tool used on the backend to catch audience. So it depends on kind of where you sit and then obviously for big studio films a trailer is advertisement pure and simple... Also, [there's] a financial barrier with a lot of independent films when it comes to why you don't see a lot of independent film trailers before a movie at the theater because the screening technical requirements are too expensive. Most theaters use what's called a DCP and to convert a film from its DVD or BluRay form to a DCP can cost anywhere from \$400-\$800 per DCP. So, as an independent filmmaker [if you] want your film trailer to role before *Deadpool* at 2,000 theaters in the United States you have to have enough money to convert your trailer to 2000 DCP's, which is not an option... If you go to an independent Art-house theater you'll see more trailers for independent films because they've invested in creating DCP copies for like the Michigan theater in Ann Arbor, IFC in New York...they'll have DCP's made just for those few theaters and then because that's also the assumption of where they're going to end up being shown.

Me: If you had to, just anything that comes on to the top of your head, any film, independent, major film, whatever, documentary, what would you say are the first 3 or 4 trailers that are the most effective that just pop into your head?

Meggie: I loved the trailer for *Obvious Child*, I remember seeing it and being like "oh my god I have to see this movie." That was a really really great trailer. They did a really good job and it was an independent film, it used its trailer to get a bigger audience...I think the trailer for *This is the End* was really great, the film was okay, but I remember seeing that trailer and like spitting out my water and being like "oh my god this is going to be great." I think the trailer for *The Hangover* movies are often really good, I think they do a really good job. I think the trailer for *Bridesmaids* was great...Oh, *Twenty Feet from Stardom*, the trailer for *Twenty Feet from Stardom*, was great. [It] also ended up winning an Oscar, but [it] was really great and interesting. The topic itself was interesting, it's something you'd want to watch anyways, but you know those are some good ones that I can think

Me: What was it about *Twenty Feet from Stardom* that you thought the trailer was so good?

Meggie: It was so true to what the actual film was going to be that you knew what you were getting into...I have a really hard time with trailers that speak down to their audience, I have the same problem with films in general, and I thought the topic was so compelling and they didn't

oversell it. It was a really big opportunity to create a trailer that was like “backup singers,” you know “costumes,” “but they don’t make any money living in poverty”...but they didn’t do that, they did a really good job of being like these are stories that deserve to be told too because they are just as interesting...in terms of film trailers I have a really big issue with trailers that give you all the good jokes and then you go to the film and you’re like “I could have just watched the trailer, none of the rest of this is good.” That’s very unique to comedy...I think a really interesting sub set of trailers is horror trailers because you know you can’t give away all the scares, but you still want like there were a few trailers when I was in film school, but even as a kid I remember seeing the trailer for the *Blair Witch Project* and having nightmares about the trailer. So that’s you know a unique subset, but I think with doc trailers, I like trailers that don’t feel like they are manipulating the potential emotional response of the viewer, but instead introduce you to the subject and make you want to know more. It shouldn’t give so much away, it should give enough so you’re like “huh I would sit through 90 minutes of that.”