

THE PRE-SHOW Revolution or Evolution?

Part 2 of 2

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The pre-show paradigm has remained constant for as long as most of us can remember. This two-part article takes a look at the pre-show and its possibilities, given new technologies and solutions now available on the market. It also asks whether the current format achieves all it can for your business.

In the first half of this series, we examined what we want to get from running the pre-show in the first place, and then looked at what, if anything, can be improved to achieve the goals we set out for it. In this month's installment, I outline ways to drive change and improvements in today's pre-show experience, including changes in format and content. We'll also see how certain European companies have already begun implementing exciting new technologies that enhance the pre-show and affect how audiences interact and engage.

THE NEXT GENERATION PRE-SHOW

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT!

The pre-show as it stands is not broken, but it is certainly under pressure to change and improve even if only from within our industry. Demand from cinema-goers will probably follow once they start to see and experience the possibilities and benefits.

We can't appear to simply make it longer using the current format, because our customers will complain; so now is the time to take a hard look at what can be done.

Cinema companies such as Vue and Odeon in Europe and Cineplex in Canada are among those who are already taking a serious look at the next generation of the pre-show and are planning to test or are already trying new ideas and formats. Advertising companies such as DCM and NCM are also very active.

OBJECTIVES FOR CHANGE

Possible factors that drive a decision to change the pre-show:

- Increased revenue from advertising and other content, nationally, regionally and locally
- Helping maintain and differentiate cinema as a premium advertising channel for media buyers
- Better targeting of content to audience profiles
- Better compliance and reporting
- Increased customer engagement
- Higher attendance for the pre-show
- Data capture of customers
- Measuring intent, interest
- Booking tickets to next film on seeing a trailer
- Improved knowledge of what the cinema offers (experiences such as Dolby ATMOS, 4K projection, IMAX, PLF, promotions, etc.)
- Improving the value proposition of cinema to customers
- Making a trip to the cinema more fun and distinctive

DRIVING CHANGE

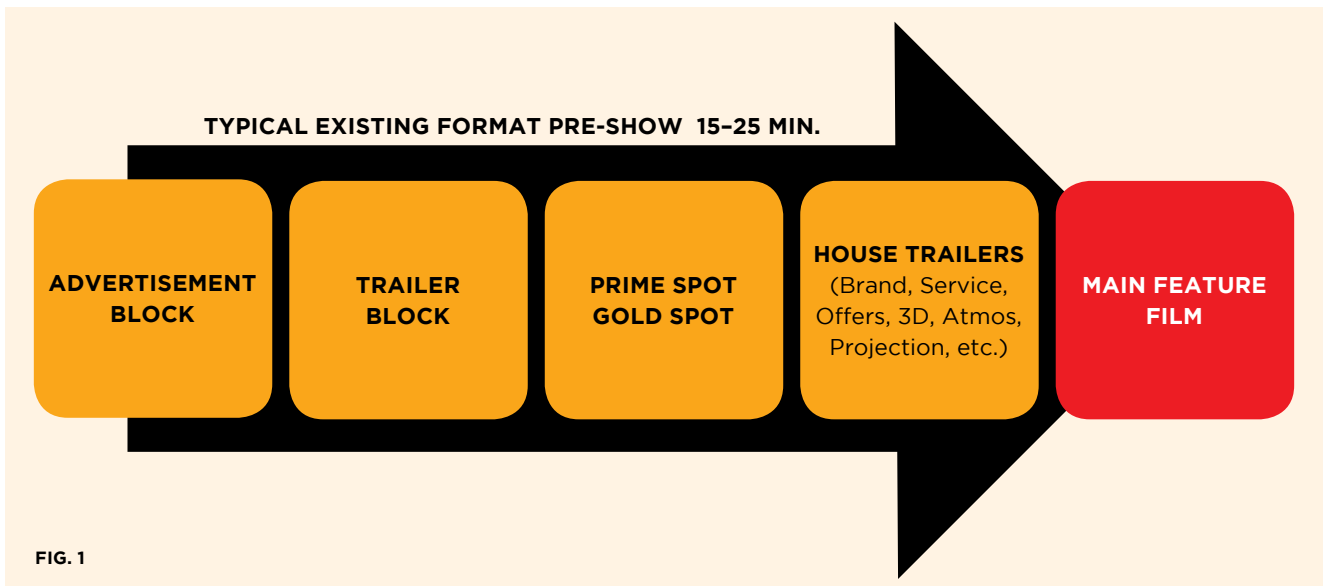
Driving change can happen in several key ways:

1. Changing the format
2. Changing the content
3. Changing the way audiences interact and engage in 1 or 2, above

1. Changing the format

Fig. 1 below is a typical format for a pre-show that we can use as a benchmark to reviewing any changes.

We can change the format by simply taking what one already has in the pre-show and shuffling it around.



Flipping the advert slot with trailers (fig. 2): This in theory would increase the value of the advertising revenue obtainable and possibly drive earlier admissions to the pre-show because of the pulling power of the trailers. A simple, quick, and possible easy win-win. The possible down side is that customers will miss the trailers, complain about the ads, and not bother with the pre-show at all.

if it requires more effort to achieve and possibly more upfront expense initially. The idea is that the pre-show is a show in its own right, one that contains interesting and informative content, news, etc., while being able to continue to include advertising and trailers.

By changing format, it is conceivable at least that new revenue streams and models can be generated that offer increased income potential either from brands,

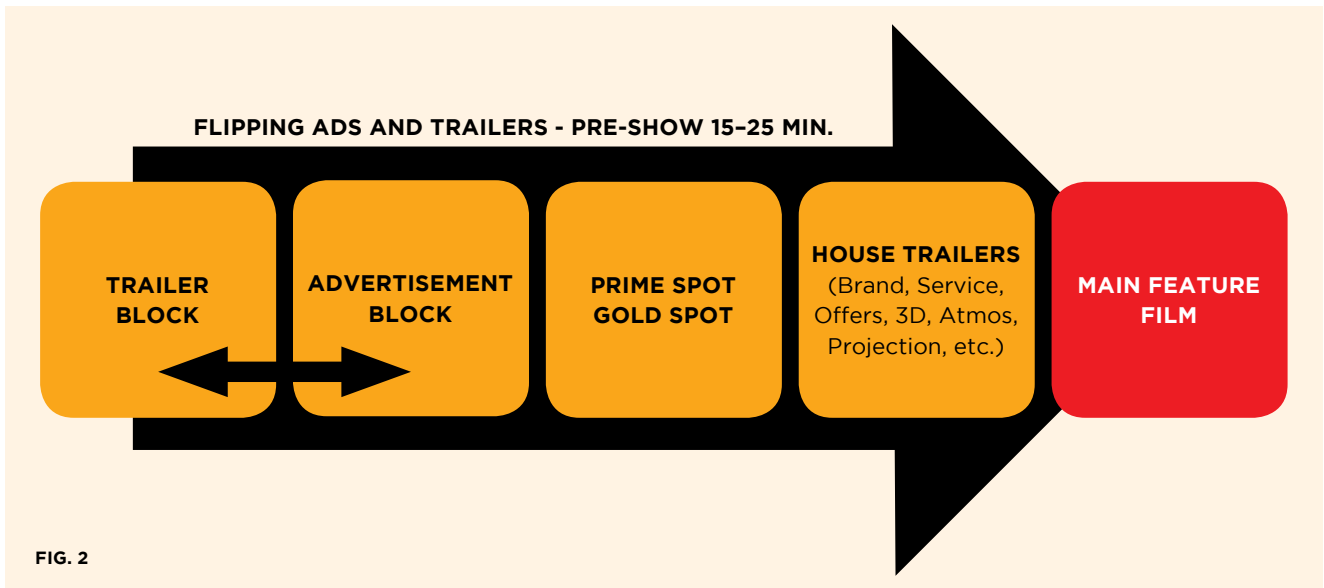


FIG. 2

Carving up adverts and trailers slots into smaller, shorter segments (fig 3): This results in a more dispersed mash-up of adverts and trailers. This might be more risky that the first alternative as it could result in a sort of non-pre-show with no proper flow or structure in the eyes of customers. It's not as clear either if advertisers would prefer this versus just placing adverts nearer to the main feature.

partnerships, sponsors, film companies, etc.

The challenge is deciding what the new "show" looks like and what it contains. It needs to be produced, scripted, filmed, and distributed. It also needs to be kept fresh with new content at least every four to six weeks and be presented possibly by a well-known figurehead. The mix of content can change depending how long the new "show" is planned to run (fig. 4).

2. Changing the content

From various conversations with exhibitors and from work I have done in the past, I know that the idea of changing content is certainly appealing, even

3. Exciting new technologies and content suppliers that enhance the pre-show, changing the way audiences interact and engage

At the forefront of driving change of the pre-show

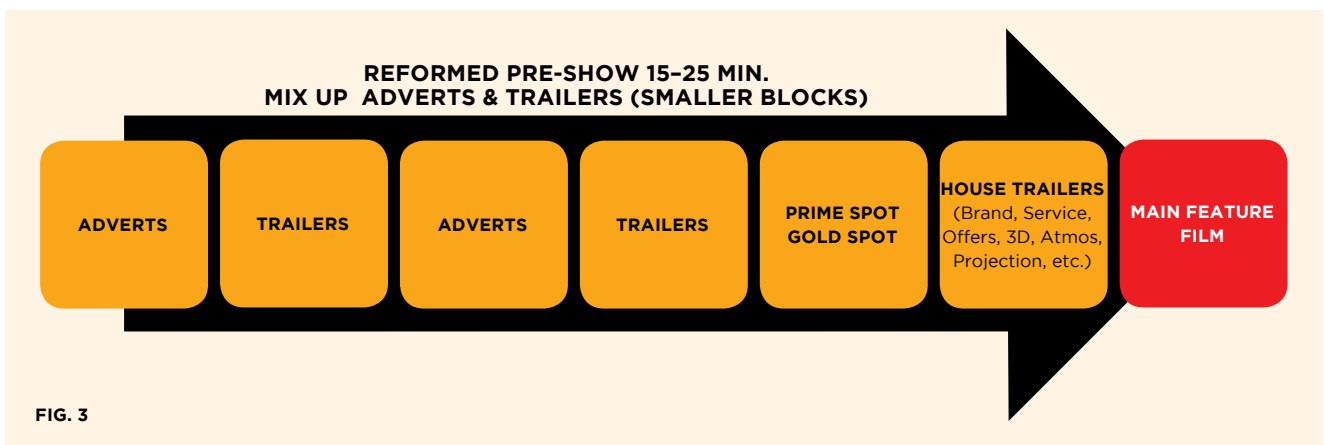
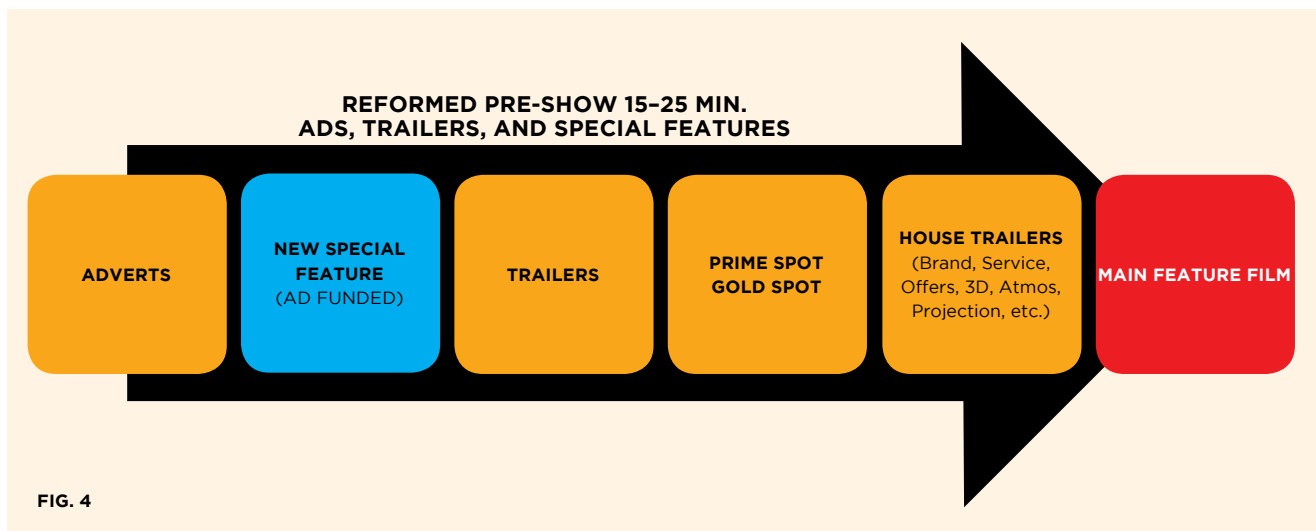


FIG. 3



there are three companies with whom I moderated a panel at this year's CineEurope in Barcelona, TimePlay, AE, and Cinime. All share a vision about improving and changing the pre-show even if their solutions may vary.

Another company worth mentioning is HTS, which should also be included in this group with their new product called CineCardz, which we will touch on later.

These companies not only provide new innovative ways that drive audience participation and engagement but also supply content that is specially created and optimized with this in mind while also delivering the sales piece cinemas require from both advertising and movies.

In effect, they enable cinemas to change the pre-show in more dynamic ways while also facilitating specific requirements from the exhibitor whether enhancing their own bespoke content or providing a more diverse range of choices than would otherwise be the case.

Let's take a look at each of these companies in turn:

TIMEPLAY

Jon Hussman, CEO of TimePlay, has been involved with the cinema industry for many years, pioneering audience interactivity and engagement of content on the big screen.

As technologies including smartphones have evolved, so has TimePlay's ability to invest in, develop, and deliver something really different for cinema audiences in the pre-show and potentially at other times as well. In fact TimePlay was the first company to offer two-way multiplayer gaming systems in multiperson venues including cinema. They have patented technology that

turns a mobile device such as a smartphone into a fully interactive gaming and communications device that can be used at venues with screens to create a completely new entertainment experience.

There is no doubt that this new technology has the potential to go beyond opening up the pre-show, as it can be applied to whole new complete show experiences including gaming, which has been a significant challenge for the cinema industry given restrictions of numbers of players able to play at any one time via standard consuls such as PlayStation and X-Box.

To emphasize how long gaming has been tried and tested by cinemas, CinemaxX in Germany was trailing pay-and-play gaming screens equipped with PCs in 2007.

Jon Hussman said: "There's a smartphone in the pocket of just about everyone sitting in the cinema. TimePlay is an app that turns these smartphones into game controllers, allowing any number of moviegoers to interact with what's happening on the cinema screen in real time. TimePlay is the only pre-show solution that enables patrons to use their phones to influence content on the big screen."

During the portion of the pre-show allotted for TimePlay, everything is interactive: ads, trailers, even sponsored entertainment.

Instead of passively watching a car commercial, audience members use their phones as steering wheels to race cars on the big screen. Instead of watching a conventional sports ad, the audience can take shots at the net themselves, launching soccer balls from their phone that sail past the goalie on the big screen.

They compete to see their names in front of the whole audience in the



list of winners, and to receive prizes, coupons, and other offers—all delivered right to their smartphones—based on performance and participation. Those prizes can also be tied to the theater's own loyalty rewards program.

TimePlay brings value to all stakeholders—audiences, cinema exhibitors, and screen advertisers. Audiences are entertained and engaged by the TimePlay-powered pre-show. They arrive early and return more frequently. The result is improved concessions sales and increased CPM's. TimePlay's interactive ad campaigns are more effective and have higher engagement and activation compared to traditional linear ones.

This isn't just theory: TimePlay has already become an integral part of the cinema experience in Canada, where it was adopted by Cineplex in 2012 and is now running on hundreds of screens across the country.

Every day Twitter is flooded with comments like: "I only go to the movies for TimePlay"; "We came 30 mins. early just for TimePlay"; and "#TimePlay just made going to the movies that much more fun."

With its patent-protected system, TimePlay has harnessed the incredible potential of interactive technology in order to reinvent the pre-show, connecting audiences to each other and the cinema screen.

TimePlay held an impressive launch of their new offering at CinemaCon this year in Vegas at a special event involving several hundred delegates.



AE (AUDIENCE ENTERTAINMENT LLC)

As Adam Cassells, CMO for AE, told me for this article, "We have been developing pre-show solutions in cinema and live events since 2007, and now we've reached a point where there's technology in every facet of our lives.

"Technology is just now part of our lives, and the stories that we tell need

to adapt to the mediums we are creating. No longer is it sufficient to simply be told a story. We want to be part of one. We've seen that revolution happen in every industry so far. In the cinema and big-screen environment, we've never been able to enable a direct connection, a real-time live connection with our audiences. We're saying to them, don't just consume, participate! Be part of this story.

"The big-screen format is a unique one. It's one where we congregate to experience the story that is happening and unfolding in front of us. How do you direct that in a group format? How do you control that in a way that's meaningful, that creates a deeper, emotional connection? Well, you do that through motion, you do that through sound, you do it through your smartphone; you do that through the tools you come equipped with when you enter the environment so you can start to see that narrative in a way you're most excited by.

"As directors, as storytellers, as creators, we often consider the narrative in one direction. And we have presented that direction incredibly well through multiple formats to date. But now, through interactivity as a format, we're creating a new brush for the canvas that lets you create and offer a more playful and reactive experience. And that's why I get up in the morning, because what we're able to do is blend technology and storytelling in a way that doesn't isolate the audience, but what brings them together, that brings them deeper into the story to have a more meaningful connection with what's happening on the screen. And that's a wonderful thing to be able to bring to life.

"All content takes time to fully take advantage of a new format, and so we have started with branded content, helping advertisers reach new success in the cinema environment; we have begun working with the studios to merge trailers and gaming, and who knows what will be next.

"We see ways to enhance the entire show, from the lobby to the exit; as you're buying your ticket you might be part of a digital campaign that immerses you, such as bar codes. When you enter the auditorium, that's when the magic really happens and always has."

AE has recently announced using Wi-Fi-based technology to complement its preexisting sound and motion platform all using its iD system (interactive dimension) and will require no app or download to sign in. This new platform was debuted at CinemaCon in Las Vegas in partnership with Barco and is due to be integrated into its Escape multiscreen offering, which was recently rolled out in a number of territories with the release of *The Maze Runner*.

AE pre-show systems are in 20 markets in the U.S. with announcements about international to be made in the near future.

Recently we have seen reported TimePlay filing a suit against Audience Entertainment LLC, alleging that it has infringed a TimePlay United States registered patent relating to two-way multiplayer gaming systems deployed in multiperson venues.





CINIME

Cinime started life as an initiative from DCM (Digital Cinema Media) around five years ago and is now a separate company with offices in London, L.A., Singapore, and Beijing.

As with TimePlay and AE, Cinime uses smartphones via a specific app that enables cinema-goers to connect with what is playing on the big screen as well as content being played on the small screens in foyers.

According to Joe Evea (COO Cinime), “We have built our technology specifically to enable mass participation. There is no infrastructure required, and anyone can participate once they have downloaded the application.

Our belief is that there is a global opportunity for cinema to become a more ‘connected’ medium. A universal cinema application that makes going to the cinema more rewarding (via entertainment and utility) will help sustain the industry and ensure it remains relevant with the tech-savvy teen and young-adult audience.

“In terms of rollout and evidence of how effective it has been, Cinime has run over 70 campaigns globally. The average engagement rate (i.e., Cinime users taking part in an experience on screen and then finding out more once they leave the cinema) is 45 percent. With 85 percent of Cinime users saying they enjoy the on-screen interactive experience and a majority number having played more than three times in the past six months, we know that Cinime can add double-digit percentage growth to the bottom line of the annual advertising revenue for participating sales houses. This comes both from Cinime-enabled campaigns being charged at a premium and the halo effect of Cinime opening new conversations with brands.”

Revenue generated via Cinime either with advertisers or direct from the consumer is shared with the ex-

hibitor and/or the cinema sales house. All revenue has to be incremental before Cinime can take any share of it.

CINECARDZ (HTS)

CineCardz is a new product recently launched at CinemaCon in Las Vegas and also at CineEurope in Barcelona this year. Pioneered by Highland Technology Solutions in France, CineCardz provides the public with the unique opportunity to preorder and purchase a greeting card on the big screen for a family member, friend, colleague, or partner. Quite simply it is the world’s largest bespoke greeting card.

It is mentioned in this article because the personalized greetings message that is booked and paid for to play at a specific cinema, day, time, and show will play during the pre-show and last up to 60 seconds. The company has stated that the nearer CineCardz are played to the main feature the better—due to the higher occupancy discussed in last month’s piece.

This is a very different service than those provided by AE, Cinime, and TimePlay. There is not direct interactivity via a mobile app or Wi-Fi with the big screen. Sending a very special and personal message



to someone in the audience, however, should create high engagement not only from the person(s) receiving it but also from the rest of the audience, whether it is for a birthday, Valentine’s Day, good luck message,

etc., people will respond positively to it.

The technology to enable a cinema to provide this offer is provided free of charge by HTS in conjunction with Arts Alliance Media. Revenue is split 50-50 with the cinema owner. All customer data is shared as the purchase of the CineCardz is done in conjunction with the exhibitor via links on their website.

The concept is simple to understand from a public point of view, and according to research run by the company it is going to be very appealing to cinema audiences across many countries.

CineCardz are purchased via a specially built website/app where buyers choose a fun animation and add their message and upload a picture. The content is approved by online filters and the cinema managers. Pricing for CineCardz will vary by market but are set to be highly affordable for the public according to recent testing.

It is planned for one CineCardz to be played per show, per screen. So over a period of a year the number of CineCardz available to purchase and drive additional revenue ratchets up to a potentially significant figure for exhibitors.

Adding a CineCardz, could, if the exhibitor wishes, extend the existing pre-show period. Otherwise, something would have to be removed to allow for it to run. Either way the additional incremental time required is probably not significant given its appeal and engagement potential.

Aside from the income from selling the CineCardz, it is felt by the company that this new service will build a new relationship between the public and cinema, a more personalized experience that strengthens the appeal of going to the cinema, driving attendance, bigger group sizes, and stronger loyalty through an improved value proposition. Greater social media engagement and sharing is also envisioned with CineCardz.

HTS is looking at extending the concept to include merchandise, and other memorabilia could be made available to purchase, which will in turn grow revenues beyond the initial booking.

Since announcing, HTS, who is also working with Arts Alliance Media on this project, has reported major interest from exhibitors in the U.S. and Europe among other markets and expect customer-facing trials to begin later this year with various partners.

CONCLUSIONS

The availability of exciting new technologies, innovation, and content from the established companies mentioned in this article enables cinemas for the first time to easily make radical and potentially effective changes to their pre-shows and possibly to extend this into other content such as music, gaming, and sporting events where interactivity can really enhance the experience.

Cinemas are also able now to maximize the benefit of investment

made in digital projection and its infrastructure.

Moving forward, cinemas will need to consider adding Wi-Fi in auditoriums, which will allow for connectivity to mobile devices for interaction with content shown on the big screens. This also applies to foyers where cinema-goers can engage with content shown on TV screens, whether film, retail, fun content, or promotions.

Mobile device usage is a given and particularly so among teens and youth. Embracing how they are used in cinema, which has been traditionally an “always-off” environment in this respect, will almost certainly add to the appeal of a trip to the cinema for this key segment.

Data obtained from audience engagement can also be a critical element as cinemas and their partners will be better placed to communicate in more relevant and personalized ways, all aimed at driving incremental revenues, loyalty, and frequency of attendance.

Strengthening the appeal of the pre-show should drive incremental revenue from brands and other partners as well, as it will emphasize the premium nature and effectiveness of cinema as a media channel.

There are now more choices on offer as to how cinemas can approach evolving their pre-shows. A lot of testing of formats and content will be needed before optimized solutions for exhibitors will be found, but that is surely a good thing.

I would not be surprised to see many new ideas evolve over the next year or so as the offerings are refined and tested. This is certainly a space where change is happening in new and exciting ways, all of which will help keep cinemas up-to-date and more relevant with their audiences alongside other new technologies being rolled out, including laser projection, sound systems, and HFR among others.

An exciting space to be involved in, to be sure. ■

Congratulations to

Charley Moss

of Bow Tie Cinemas

and all ShowEast 2015 Honorees

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