

## The fast-evolving world of markets & festivals (Part 2)

By Nick Edwards 4 days ago



NATPE Budapes

**Barely a handful of live industry events took place this year, due to the Coronavirus pandemic. In the conclusion to his two-part article, Nick Edwards looks at how Covid-19 has brought both the benefits and pitfalls of market events into sharper focus.**

Fuelled by discussions, drinks and deals, the rollercoaster of the European TV drama market circuit was a sorely missed part of the 2020 calendar. But just like the festivals (that were discussed in the first of this two-part series) that often accompany them, much has been learnt from a challenging year.

As in many industries, Covid-19 has amplified trends that were already taking place. The price of attending events, coupled with associated travel and accommodation costs, was already being questioned. Panels with the same speakers, covering the same topics, frequently left attendees thinking; did I really travel eight hours to a far-flung corner of Europe to hear this? “There was always a feeling, do we really need a one-week market, can’t we just do it in a couple of days?” says Oliver Bachert, EVP of Beta Film.

Despite the absence of markets, TV dramas have still been sold and streamers and traditional services have been dropping new shows with a regularity that, to the untrained eye, appears little different to 2019. If a noticeable shortage does occur it is more likely to be in 2021 when hold-ups in production from this year will filter through to schedules (most likely from North America when Covid-19 hit just as shooting season was about to begin). “I’ve not had the feeling I’m missing out on something, significantly,” continues Bachert, of Beta’s experience of 2020.

## Sticking to essentials

Established organisations and individuals who have built relationships over decades continue to work as normal, just online. Virtual meetings, online sessions, and the surrounding technologies “have certainly become more professional and beneficial,” says Fred Burcksen, president and CEO of ZDF Enterprises.

“They will continue to be an important tool in the acquisition process of the future,” he says. In fact, some small advantages have even been noticed. “At the beginning of the crisis, people were stuck at home so maybe we had a little more time, though screen time, than you would at a big market where you do back-to-back meetings all day,” says Bachert.



These new trends cannot be ignored. Attendees who have so many facilities available to them online now have a clearer understanding of what exactly they gain from attendance. The enforced lockdown means businesses now know what travel is essential and what is not. “Large companies may only now send 10 delegates when they used to send 40,” says Bachert.

However, physical events always have one element that can’t be replicated in the virtual world. “It’s a people business and it’s so important to build trust,” says Anna Katharina Brehm, production and content director of Seriencamp, Munich. Therefore markets will always be essential.

“Only there can buyers get the feeling for the market, trends and information about new ideas,” says Burcksen. “For co-production and project development, markets and congresses are definitely still needed.”

Francesco Capurro, head of Series Mania Forum, agrees. “It’s easier to buy and sell completed series online, but to invest in the development or to co-produce a show you need to establish a much deeper relationship with your partners, you need to meet physically.”

Established players need to make new connections just as much as new blood does, “especially with new markets popping up that weren’t strong in content creation a couple of years ago, such as Spain and Eastern Europe,” says Bachert. Likewise, due to mergers, acquisitions and new people starting in new roles, everyone needs to network.

For Jorg Winger, managing director of Fremantle-owned Big Window Productions, this is the main attraction. “Having important people together in the same small square mileage is what makes these events worth it.” Just some of the attendees who would have attended Series Mania this year underline his point. “In 2020, we were supposed to welcome Globo from Brazil, Nippon TV from Japan and we created a Franco-Israeli residency for young screenwriters,” says Capurro.



Julia Fidel

### **Adding value**

With more and more events taking place all are getting squeezed. Physical markets need to accentuate what they do well in order to add value. In addition to curating Berlinale’s official festival selection, Julia Fidel, head of Berlinale Series, will also curate a TV drama selection specifically for the market, planned for next year. “Series that have particular commercial appeal which we recommended for buyers,” she says. The market team will also produce content in a studio and put it online to be available alongside bookable market screenings.

Technology meant that TV markets could still take place this year. However as the proliferation of online resources continues, the intangible nature of human interaction may become even more important than it’s ever been. “What I miss most are the meetings you didn’t plan,” says Winger, “a certain chaos that creates interesting opportunities and connections you never get elsewhere.”