

## UP THERE CASE STUDY

### Overview

*Putting the audience in the driver's seat*

*Our primary aim was to test a new way of releasing a film, by identifying who the target audience were in advance of the UK release and planning the release strategy around this information; the audience dictate where and how the film is screened, either theatrically or through VOD.*

UP THERE is a comedy set in the afterlife which has won awards around the world, including two BAFTA (Scotland) Awards, Best Director and Best Film; and the main prize of Independent Spirit Award at Santa Barbara International Film Festival. UP THERE began life as a very successful short film, LAID OFF. LAID OFF performed well at festivals around the world but also had a strong online presence, with over half a million hits on youtube alone. As an offbeat indie comedy with an already proven online audience, we felt UP THERE was a good fit to try a distribution strategy that was driven by online technology.

### **Key Partners:**

Distrify (technological support, heat map and data collation)

Brand Movers (digital engagement specialist)

Zealot (trailer and teasers)

Premier PR (PR)

Distrify have sophisticated technology that gives extremely detailed information about trailer views, including exact location of audience. They also offer a VOD download through the film's trailer.

Zealot made the trailer and the set of 'how to be dead' teaser trailers.

Brandmovers formulated the on-line campaign and ran the facebook and twitter accounts for the duration of the campaign. They had worked successfully on the

online campaigns for ‘The Disappearance of Alice Creed’ and ‘TT3D’ so they were a natural fit for this campaign.

### **Summary of campaign goals**

As a small independent British film, UP THERE did not have a huge marketing or distribution budget. But given its target audience – 18-35 year olds, with a strong online presence – we felt we could turn its size and ‘underground’ vibe to our advantage with the marketing and distribution campaign.

Our main goal was to find our audience using online teasers and the film’s trailer, and let the audience viewing statistics dictate where the film was screened. The strategy required some level of flexibility, as it relied on calling cinemas direct, armed with the audience information, in order to get film bookings.

Our secondary goals were to maximize our small distribution budget by using innovative online games and publicity in order to achieve offline PR and subsequent audience awareness. We also wanted to test the effectiveness of the Distrify technology, to see how accurately the trailer views would predict audience interest. Finally, we wanted to reach out to cinemas direct in order to create awareness about this new method of finding audiences, with a view to being able to use it in the future with other independent films and film-makers.

### **Detail of campaign and timeline**

The campaign was scheduled to run over twelve weeks. Zealot created a set of six ‘how to be dead’ teasers, which we released in pairs, ten days apart using the Distrify technology. Fans could view the first teaser and then sign up to watch the next one for free. We followed this pattern with the subsequent teasers (three – six). A week later, we released the trailer, first exclusively via Empire Online, and then wider, this time using the Distrify technology.

The purpose of the teasers was to raise awareness of the film’s concept and tone, and also allow us the opportunity to monitor where exactly people were interested in the film. From there we were able to call up cinemas direct to ask them to book the film

wherever there was demand. By and large, cinemas responded very positively to a producer calling direct about their film. Their engagement and understanding with the strategy behind the campaign varied between cinemas and the individuals running them.

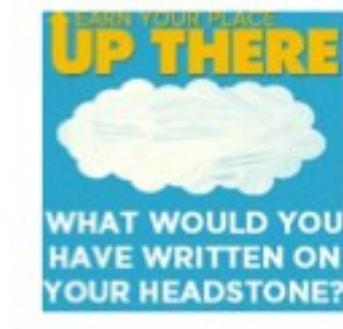
In week five, we announced the online 'Level Up' promotion, where fans are invited to 'Write their own epitaph' and vote on other epitaphs for the chance to win exclusive film-related prizes. The top prize was the opportunity to 'Win the UK Premiere' at your local cinema. This prize was to be decided in conjunction with Distrify's 'heat map' which showed which area had the most audience interest. The good thing about the Level Up Promotion was that each level was only unlocked if there was enough interest, so we were not obliged to offer up the higher prizes.

The Level Up promotion was implemented via an UP THERE microsite, and took place from weeks five to twelve. Week twelve was the film's premiere and UK release.

### **Online performance of the film**

Brandmovers dealt with the management of the twitter and facebook accounts. They also set up a microsite to manage the 'Write your own epitaph' game.

The statistics were broken down into followers, interactions and impressions. All these elements performed well, but it was the numbers of impressions that was particularly impressive.



### **Overall**

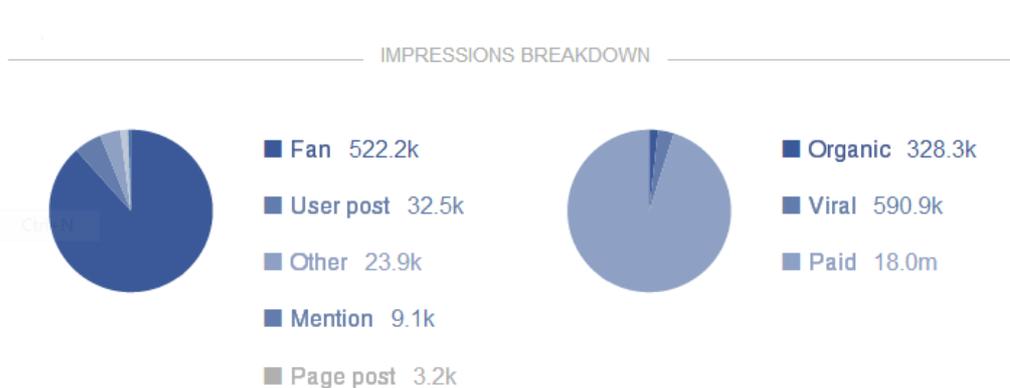
6,704 Total Followers (Including facebook and twitter)

68,417 Total Interactions (Including facebook and twitter)

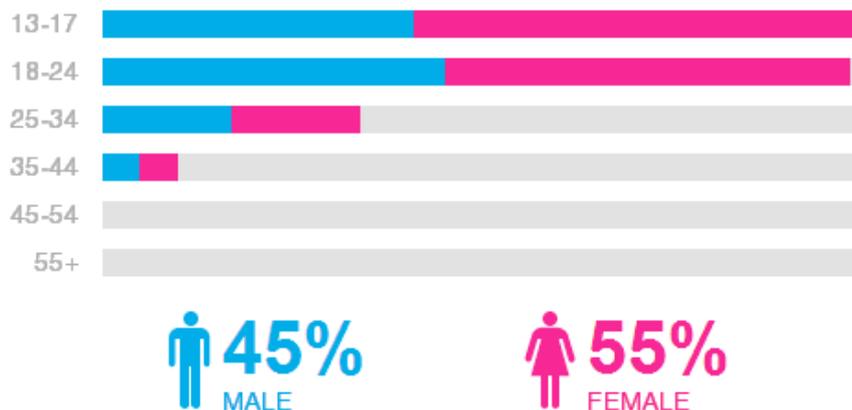
22,434,400 Total Impressions (Including facebook and twitter)

These figures are for the twelve-week period covering the campaign, up to the film's release.

### UP THERE Campaign



### IMPRESSIONS BY AGE & GENDER

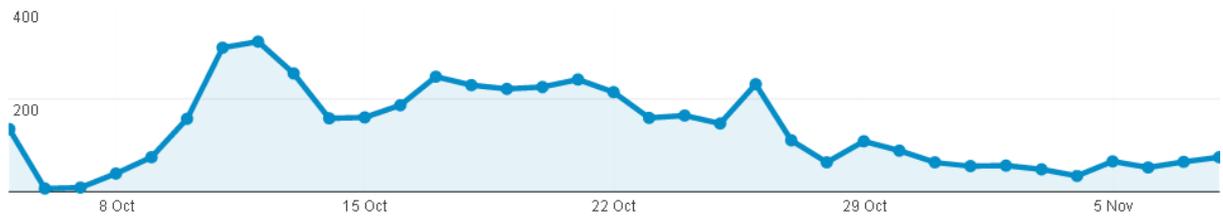


### UP THERE Promotion Microsite

4,836 visits

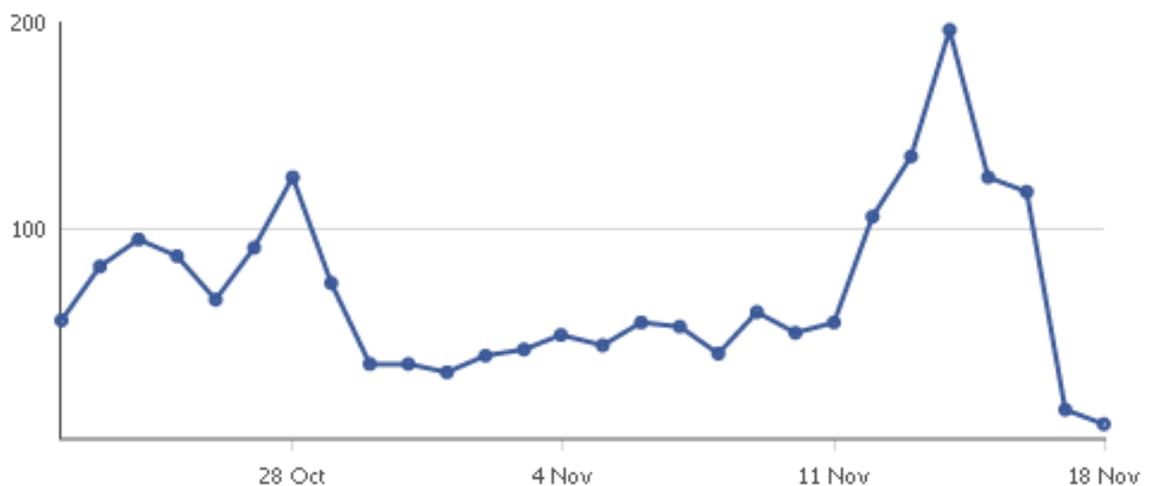
6,154 page views

0:03:10 average time spent on site



### UP THERE Facebook Page

Likes throughout the promotion:



1841% increase in Likes

6297% increase in acquisition rate\*

15,145 engaged users, 4562% increase\*

18,934,971 content impressions, 52836% increase\*

### UP THERE Twitter

22,067 interactions

1,980,259 reach

3,485,650 impressions

## **UP THERE App (on facebook)**

159 installs

1,527 total users

3,408 story impressions

## **UT Facebook Ads**

17,408,736 impressions

0.057% CTR

9,845 clicks

7,442 actions

£0.29 Average CPC (ROI increased by 34% compared to CPC version of ad)

**The social ad campaign was 94x more cost effective compared to banner ads**

## **Top 10 Referral Sources**

1. s-static.ak.facebook.com 1,007

2. static.ak.facebook.com 387

3. t.co 357

4. reddit.com 253

5. facebook.com 203

6. theprizefinder.com 135

7. trafficadbar.com 84

8. uptherethemovie.com 80

9. comedy.co.uk 43

10. m.facebook.com 31

\*Compared to same time period before promotion launch

### **Top 10 locations**

**(Heat map which reflects teaser and trailer views)**

1. London

2. Ashford

3. Lincoln

4. Manchester

5. Glasgow

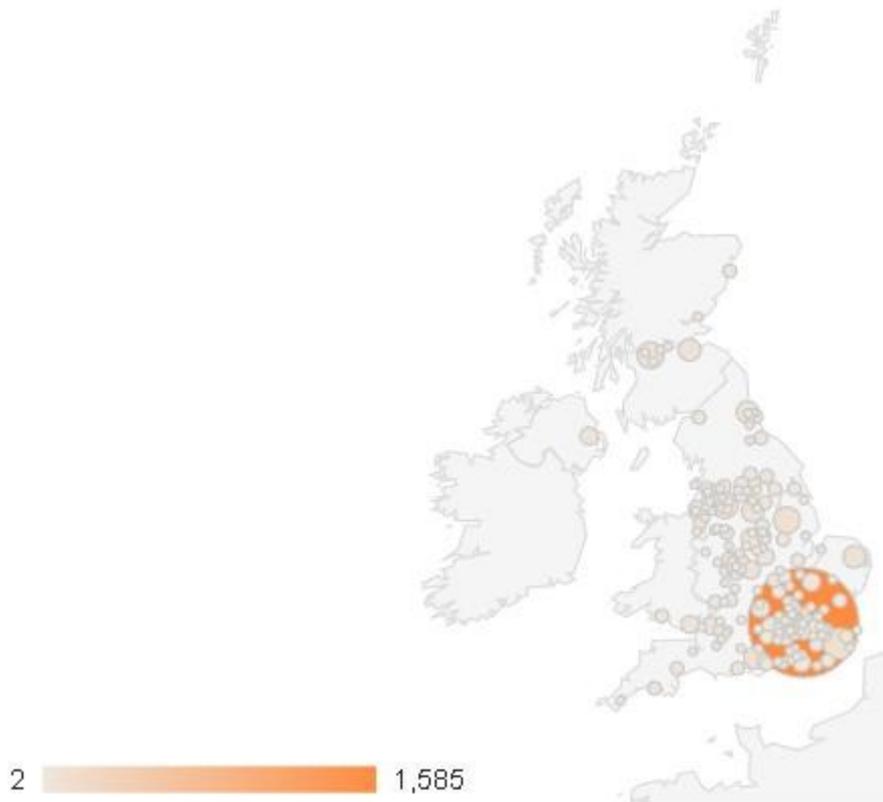
6. Birmingham

7. Edinburgh

8. Leeds

9. Sheffield

10. Derby



## **Challenges:**

### **Simultaneous VOD and theatrical release**

One of the big questions we had was whether to release simultaneously on VOD and theatrically. In the end, because of the financial implications – we didn't have the budget to effectively do two releases – we decided to release simultaneously theatrically and VOD. This in turn had ramifications for the cinemas we could approach, as the bigger chains won't consider a film under those conditions. In particular, one large cinema chain wanted to include us as part of their 'Independent Cinema' Strand but wouldn't budge on the window issue, so they couldn't be used.

This then had further ramifications when it came to testing the model of audience-dictated demand. It became a less 'pure' experiment, as we couldn't simply approach a cinema that had large audience interest as many of them wouldn't consider the film. Moreover, some cinemas embraced the idea behind what we were doing better than

others; while some cinemas simply put the film on because they liked it, irrespective of demand. So ultimately, it proved impossible to fully stick to the original principles the release was set up with; however, the good thing about this was we could analyse how films performed in areas where demand wasn't as high, to see what a difference it made.

### **New technology and new release strategy**

Another challenge linked to this one was just how new the technology and strategy was. There were chains who wanted to support the film fully, but took a long time to really get their heads around the Distrify technology; by which time we were too close to the release to make a difference.

Also, the idea of an audience-dictated release was at times hard for an audience to get their heads around. Again, some people fully embraced and understood it, but others found it a little confusing. There were two other aspects of the release that were also fairly new and unfamiliar to the audience; the idea of using teasers, and the Distrify technology. We noticed that the teasers worked better in America, where even with no US marketing or ad spend, the teasers were in some weeks more popular than in the UK. Also, people aren't used to watching trailers via the Distrify player, so in the end we had to put the trailer up on youtube, where people are more familiar with searching for trailers. This meant that our statistics weren't as accurate as they could be, but in hindsight we should have still put it on youtube from the beginning, as that is the natural place people search for trailers online. Finally, the VOD release was far more popular through the recognized channels – ie i-tunes, Netflix etc – again, people often didn't really understand they could watch the film as a VOD via the Distrify player, even when we explicitly told them that. They still preferred to go to i-tunes or their preferred portals to watch it.

As another smaller technological point, keeping on top of the huge volume of online data and trying to understand it proved really difficult. Brand Movers were very good at analyzing the data they were responsible for (mainly facebook and twitter), but there were so many other sources of data to look at that it became hard to keep track of them and fully understand them.

## **PR**

Our biggest challenge by far was the fact that our distribution strategy and ‘Win the UK Premiere’ campaign got very little off-line PR and editorial interest. We were really relying on this for additional publicity around the film. It would have also helped with the issues mentioned above to do with people not necessarily understanding or embracing the strategy behind the release; having off-line editorial to ‘validate’ the on-line strategy would have really helped this, but we weren’t able to achieve this.

## **Positive Aspects**

The release of UP THERE tested new strategies and new ways of using digital technology, so overall was a good start in trying to push new boundaries and ways of reaching audiences. There was a correlation between cinema performance, cinema engagement, and the heat map (see below for more details); so moving forward, it would be interesting to test the idea of the heat map and an audience-driven release with a bigger film.

For independent film-makers, it’s an encouraging start, as many of our audience mentioned they liked British independent films and didn’t get to see enough of them in cinemas near them. And we were able to build a strong online body of fans for the film using very little online spend.

Regarding benefits specifically linked to UP THERE, although the release was very small, we were able to get reviewed in all the national press and many local newspapers, and we now have a database of fans for the film. The film continues to have a ‘slow build’, increasing in Twitter followers and facebook fans every day, and still getting VOD and trailer interest. This release raised awareness of the film in a way that wouldn’t have happened without the theatrical release and on-line campaign.

## **Breakdowns of VOD and Theatrical Release**

### **First month of VOD**

£2100 Film Flex

£1500 I-tunes

## **Cinema release**

Based on the film's heat map and 'write your own epitaph' competition, the film's premiere was held at Reel Cinemas, Borehamwood. As with the other aspects of the campaign, this received a lot of online buzz, but less offline press and PR. But the online buzz was extremely effective, as we had most of our cast out to support the film and a cinema foyer that was well branded with UP THERE logos and artwork. We had live tweeting and facebook updates of stills from the premiere, which also helped to create buzz and excitement about the film.

On balance, it was probably worth holding the film's premiere in this way, as we had support from the cinema so we were able to keep costs to a minimum, and it stood out from other film premieres.

Release figures:

Took £5800

Screened on opening weekend at: Prince Charles, Hull, York, Falmouth, Glasgow Film Theatre, Eden Court Inverness for four to seven days.

Opening weekend one-off screenings at Edinburgh Cameo, Bath Little Theatre, Borehamwood.

Later one-off screenings at Nottingham Broadway, Welwyn Garden City, Ipswich Film Theatre, Newcastle Tyneside Cinema, FACT Liverpool, Hebden Bridge.

The vast majority of the cinemas were booked in advance of the film's release.

The best performing site was Glasgow, which is a reflection on the fact that the film is shot in Glasgow and had great press there, but also the engagement of the cinema in not only the film, but also the Distrify platform. The next best performing site was London, followed by Inverness, Bath and Hebden Bridge. All of these sites had cinemas that were engaged in the film and were proactive in talking to their audiences about it. Conversely, the Ipswich Film Theatre performed disappointingly, despite performing well on the heat map and having an engaged cinema - perhaps because it was a couple of weeks after the opening weekend.

The film performed particularly badly at Falmouth and Aberyswyth. However, this wasn't surprising, as they hadn't performed well on the heat map. This was an

example of us booking the film in because it had an engaged cinema booker and liked the film, but in fact the heat map told us in advance of the screenings there wasn't the demand there.

It's hard to give a truly accurate rendition of how the heat map predicted audience interest, as it's such a small release, but by and large it was a good indicator of how well the film would perform. But there were some anomalies – the film performed badly in Edinburgh, but it had a lot of interest on the heat map. But the Edinburgh screening was a one-off, so even with audience interest, it can be hard to get them into one specific screening.

Below is a table which details the conversion rate of number of cinema attendees divided by trailer views at that geographical location during the release dates. It only details the Distrify trailer views, so doesn't take into account the other places on-line the trailer was available. So it's not a great way of working out the exact mathematical conversion rate of trailer views to cinema attendees, but it does give an indication of relative geographical interest in the film and how that relates to cinema attendance. There are three cities – Bath, Inverness and York - which appeared not to be affected by trailer views; their cinema attendees came from other sources. Bath and Inverness in particular had cinemas that were very engaged with their audiences, and York student radio ran a piece on the film as it was released, which could partially explain this.

<b>Cinema / Location</b>	<b>Conversion rate (no of attendees divided by Distrify trailer views during release dates)</b>
London	0.825
Hull	3.875
York	19
Falmouth	2.4
Aberyswyth	0
Nottingham	0.66
Bath	60
Welwyn Garden City	5.8

Inverness	20
Glasgow	5.83
Hebden Bridge	NA (data not available)
Newcastle	1
Edinburgh	1

### **Overall Costs**

Prints, trailers etc - £22000

Online media - £26,000 including Brand Movers game and social advertising. Social advertising proved to be very cost efficient – if you spend money on facebook, it immediately attracts followers.

Publicity - £17000 including PR, premieres and press screenings

Production - £28,000 including trailers, teasers, prizes, website

Distrify technology - £25,000

No money was allocated to print advertising. In retrospect, this wasn't great for the campaign, but because we had hoped that the publicity around the premiere would attract editorial.

### **Effects and Conclusions**

The release of UP THERE tested a lot of fairly new (or in some cases, brand new), strategies and technologies: the Distrify heat map, the Distrify player, using teasers to raise awareness of a film, and having the audience dictate a film's release and premiere location. In hindsight, there were probably too many new strategies within the release to make it easy for people to get their head around what we were doing. This comprehension issue particularly hindered by the lack of PR and editorial around the film's release; had we achieved that, the release and its strategy would most likely have achieved a lot more credibility and comprehension.

However, we were able to leverage more awareness of the film and a larger online audience than we would have without the release strategy we used and the accompanying nationwide reviews.

In a broader sense, the release was encouraging for British independent film-makers and the future of using digital distribution to reach audiences. There is a strong appetite for British independent films, and a feeling from audiences outside of large cities that they are not fully catered to in that respect. Therefore it feels as if more research and work can be done into British independent film-makers who can't afford a traditional release, collaborating on the release of their films so they can share information, strategies and most importantly, the database of fans one builds up around each film on their release.

Moreover, the campaign show there is encouraging potential in using technology to predict and monitor a film's release, thus helping take out the risk and unknowns for a cinema and distributor. This model seems to work better at the smaller scale, so could potentially be used by independent film-makers. But the Distrify technology is too unknown for it to be properly embraced by the audiences (as they like to view trailers on youtube and online film magazines, not via the website or Distrify platform). This is a significant drawback in the model so far, but the wider picture of potentially using online platforms and statistics to plan a film's release is very encouraging.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Official website: [www.uptherethemovie.com](http://www.uptherethemovie.com)

Official facebook page: [www.facebook.com/uptherethemovie](http://www.facebook.com/uptherethemovie)

Official twitter handle: [www.twitter.com/uptherethemovie](http://www.twitter.com/uptherethemovie)