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Defining Success: Documentaries on Digital Platforms

DOC releases its first *Digital Distribution Report* on Canadian documentary

Findings from research conducted by the Documentary Organization of Canada / Association des documentaristes du Canada (DOC) as part of its first *Digital Distribution Report* indicate that distribution on digital services is only slightly disrupting traditional audience consumption patterns.

The *Digital Distribution Report* establishes benchmarks for the performance of Canadian documentaries on broadcaster portals; charts how Canadian documentaries perform on iTunes; and tracks how many views NFB.ca receives worldwide and the number of views they draw on mobile devices with their apps.

The report is the first of its kind and puts numbers to the notion of digital success. So, what is success in the digital realm?

- In Canada, the average viewership of a popular feature documentary on a broadcaster portal is 8,000 views over the course of a year.
- The top viewed episode of a documentary series garners almost 60,000 views over the course of a year.
- The average viewership of the most popular English documentary titles on NFB.ca is 64,702 views (worldwide) over the course of a year, and 37,226 views for French (worldwide).
- The average viewership of the top 5 English titles on the NFB's mobile applications is 12,556 views a year (worldwide), and 4,372 French (worldwide).
- On Rogers On Demand Online, total documentary viewership exceeded 28,000 total requested views over a 10-month period.

There is no doubt that more Canadians are accessing documentaries on digital platforms. However, the viewership of individual titles is in stark contrast with the performance of the most popular documentaries on television that draw around 900,000 viewers.

“By providing data on the performance of Canadian documentaries over a variety of digital distribution channels, this report addresses an information gap for the industry. OMDC is proud to support this research, which we feel will be useful in establishing benchmarks when it comes to the performance of Canadian content on these channels” said Karen Thorne-Stone, President and CEO of the Ontario Media Development Corporation.

DOC chair, Katie McKenna, adds: "One of the goals with this report was to find out whether actual viewing numbers justify the recent hype around online distribution of documentaries. What we found was that online consumption is still a tiny fraction of the audience numbers documentaries reach on television. Multi-platform distribution is a welcome trend and holds enormous potential for our community -- but if Canadians prefer to watch their documentaries on television, our regulators and broadcasters need to make sure they're still available there."

The Digital Distribution Report, produced with funding support from the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC) will be launched at DOC's distribution day on November 3, 2011 in Toronto.

The report can be found at:

<http://www.docorg.ca/en/publications-and-reference-documents>

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The Documentary Organization of Canada/l'Association des documentaristes du Canada (DOC) is the collective voice of independent documentary filmmakers across Canada. It is a member driven organization dedicated to promoting, supporting and developing the art form of documentary filmmaking. As a national non-profit association it advocates on behalf of its members to foster an environment conducive to documentary production and strives to strengthen the sector within the broader film production industry.

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