

Lisa Opie Comment Piece
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To say these were interesting times for film in general and for the regional screen agencies in particular would be an understatement. There are many questions facing us... how do we grow our blossoming creative businesses in the face of widespread spending cuts? How do we build on our previous successes whilst reorganising the funding infrastructure? How do we prepare ourselves for an infinitely more complex digital future whilst empowering our creatives to reap the commercial rewards they richly deserve? These are a difficult bag of questions and in light of a perceived lack of interest in what is happening to the film infrastructure outside of the capital they need to be addressed as publically and as quickly as possible. Why? So that talent in all its guises is afforded the chance to join in the conversation before arbitrary decisions are made that directly impact upon their creative futures.

There are three things of which I am sure. Firstly change *is good* when it forces innovation. And there are some excellent examples of investment innovation out there. At EM Media we've offered equity, quasi equity, loans and matching funds *and* we've offered business support. We offered funding to Anton Corbijn's "Control" and we've backed Shane Meadows "This is England" Nick Whitfield's Skeletons and the brand new and already critically acclaimed "Oranges and Sunshine". So good films have had regional finance. Nothing new there you may argue, although I beg to differ. Alongside the critical acclaim afforded our backed films we have, in many cases, recouped our investment ensuring that our success funds the success of an even greater number of creative businesses. 80% of the films backed by EM Media have been directed by first and second time film makers and we are now able to sustain our overhead indefinitely enabling us to pump funding where it's needed most.

But our work is not all about critical success... within the post- UKFC debate the focus has been on film production with everything else it impacts upon barely registering within the heated debates. Lottery support for film goes way beyond making films. EM Media is based in one of the most rural areas in England. As such Lottery support has been put to exceptional use putting the consumer first. It has stimulated the development of a network of 27 urban and rural exhibitors from 3 urban venues helping them share best practice, put film makers in touch with their audiences and audiences in touch with film no matter where they live. And most often our interventions have been really small but powerful... from £2000 to get some legal training in format rights or £500 to attend a conference.

Secondly I'm sure that change is *bad* if it throws the baby out with the bath water. Where we have built skills, experience and credibility let's harness them. At EM we have regularly co-financed projects with Film 4, Ingenious, BBC Films, Channel 4, Scottish Screen (as was), Film Agency Wales, Matador and Vertigo, and as the only British investor in Anton Corbijn's¹ *Control* (shot in Nottingham) we have a proven ability to deliver stellar projects out of London. Screen Yorkshire set its stall out differently to EM Media in film terms backing period dramas such as *Wuthering Heights* and TV dramas such as *Red Riding*. The neighbouring agencies have complemented each other well, partners in the Warp X scheme and each adding to the East side of England's deserved film reputation.

And finally, change is *very good* when it forces you to look afresh at customer requirement and question how best to service them. We have the opportunity to listen and learn, to

consult and complement. In the kick bollock scramble to cut costs let's make sure we take time to ask our customers and partners what works for them. Let's make sure that we recognise creativity can and does kick off anywhere and avoid the gravitational pull of those areas already served by the BBC or Channel 4. Let's not be lazy but ensure we come up with a better solution than the one we had before.

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