

# JON BARRENECHEA: “WE SEE THE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE AS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF THE VALUE CHAIN”

By Michael Rosser

Jon Barrenechea is vice president of marketing at MUBI, the curated SVOD service that is available in 195 countries around the world. MUBI also provides its members with weekly cinema tickets to select new releases with MUBI GO and access to its international film criticism and news publication on Notebook. MUBI also produces and theatrically distributes ambitious films by both emerging and renowned filmmakers, which members can watch exclusively on its service.

Barrenechea was previously deputy director of marketing at Picturehouse Cinemas and both executive produced and distributed the 2015 documentary *HAND GESTURES*.

## How do you see cinemas and platforms such as MUBI serving audiences in future?

MUBI sees a close partnership with the exhibition sector as key. MUBI GO, our cinema-going app that sends MUBI members to cinemas in the UK, Ireland and India, is the real-life application of that partnership.

I think both independent cinemas and MUBI share the same goal: to bring amazing films from all over the world to audiences everywhere and ensure there is a rich film culture beyond the studio blockbuster.

How people reach this content is changing – but the social experience of a cinema screening will always be with us, as long as we're able to congregate. There was a huge appetite to watch films in cinemas before the pandemic and that will return once it's safe to do so.

## Do you think platforms and cinemas can find better ways to work together, or at least coexist?

MUBI GO is our way of working closely with exhibition (and distribution), and the success of the app in the UK, Ireland and India means we are now planning launches in the US and Germany in 2021. At the beginning of the pandemic, we partnered with over 500 cinemas across the world to offer their members and customers access to MUBI while cinemas were closed.

In addition, we are planning to continue releasing films in cinemas, with a slate of titles coming in 2021. We see the theatrical experience as a fundamental part of the value chain and essential for any healthy film market. Our work with film festivals continues as well, both virtual and physical, and we expect to continue to grow that collaboration.

Whatever the state of the industry at the end of this global crisis, we hope to continue supporting the exhibition sector and deepening our ties.

## What do you think the industry tends to get wrong about how we think about audiences today?

We know there is a huge appetite for high quality, diverse, independent content. Some parts of the industry aren't serving that audience by relying almost entirely on large scale tentpole product instead. We see big opportunities for independent films, both in cinemas and at home.



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## Do you think the pandemic will have a long-term impact on audience behaviour?

The rate and pace of changes in consumer behaviour were already at full speed before the pandemic, and the crisis has only accelerated those changes. It remains to be seen what further changes are ahead of us.

But as I say, cinemas are here to stay. Once people feel safe to return, the appetite for a social viewing experience will return as well. We're excited about re-launching MUBI GO and putting films in cinemas again. That said, many people have discovered MUBI during this period and that growth will continue – but we don't think this growth needs to come at the expense of other parts of the industry.

## What excites you about the future of film distribution and exhibition?

We're really looking forward to releasing our titles in cinemas again. We've been experimenting with distribution for some time now, trying different models, and we think that the future will require flexibility, agility and imagination.

Whilst the pandemic has had negative impacts on the industry, it will create more opportunities in the future for independent film, with a sudden gap in mainstream content and audiences hungry for new films. They've been discovering films they may not have even considered before.

*Michael Rosser is a London-based writer and editor specialising in the UK and international film industry. He regularly contributes to Screen International, previously worked at IMDb and Broadcast, and moderates at screenings, events and film festivals*