

Taking Australian stories to the world

Recent local success stories have underlined the importance of telling Australian tales on screen, writes Claire White.

Audiences have never had more access to screen content. With millions of film and television titles available literally at our fingertips, what we watch has powerful effects, both economically and culturally.

Uniting writers, directors, producers, actors and crew, the Make It Australian campaign aims to secure ongoing commitment by streaming platforms and the government to invest in Australian stories, made by Australians.

Commercial television and public broadcasters such as the ABC must meet a 55 per cent local content quota on air each day, incentivising investment in Australian television shows. However, streamers here are not subject to the same requirements.

“We’ve got a whole new way of delivering content to Australians [but] there hasn’t been a way, so far, that adapts that framework onto those new services which have entered [and] dominate the market,” explains Matthew Daener, chief executive of Screen Producers Australia.

“We’re talking in many ways a complete change to our industry



Matthew Daener is chief executive of Screen Producers Australia.

because of services like Netflix and Amazon,” he adds.

A study conducted in 2022 by Telsyte found that more than 70 per cent of households in Australia were connected to at least one streaming or video-on-demand service.

“An ongoing supply of content is really important for Australian consumers, and it also can provide a window to Australia across the world, given that many of these services are operating globally,” Daener says.

Recent investment by streamers in Australian content demonstrate such success. Netflix’s 2022 reboot of *Heartbreak High* reached the top 10 in

more than 43 countries. But it was also beloved here, spending weeks in the local top 10, rocketing its stars to fame on social media and earning eight AACTA nominations.

“It’s very modern and hit a kind of zeitgeist [that] became a conversation for its audiences,” Daener says. “It [also] worked ... to position Australia as an entertaining, funny but serious, diverse and interesting community for the generation ... being portrayed.”

ABC Kids show *Bluey* is another highlight. Available on ABC iView and internationally via Disney+, by 2021 the show had reached 480 million plays. It’s now all over TikTok and was even

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Matthew Daener

referenced in the American sitcom *Abbott Elementary*.

Beyond demonstrating the commercial viability of distinctly Australian content in an international market, Make It Australian stresses the importance of homegrown stories for homegrown audiences.

“Given the power of the medium and the quantity of time we spend on screens, [representation] is a really important exercise,” Daener says. “So, what we’re really trying to do with Make It Australian is to make sure people are validated, really, and that they have a chance to connect to their own story as well as others.”

This year the federal government announced the “Revive” National Cultural Policy, outlining plans to revive the arts and entertainment sector, including local content quotas for streaming platforms they hope will be in place by mid-2024.

Ultimately, Make It Australian wants to see the local entertainment industry, a major employer of writers and directors, actors and crew, grow.

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