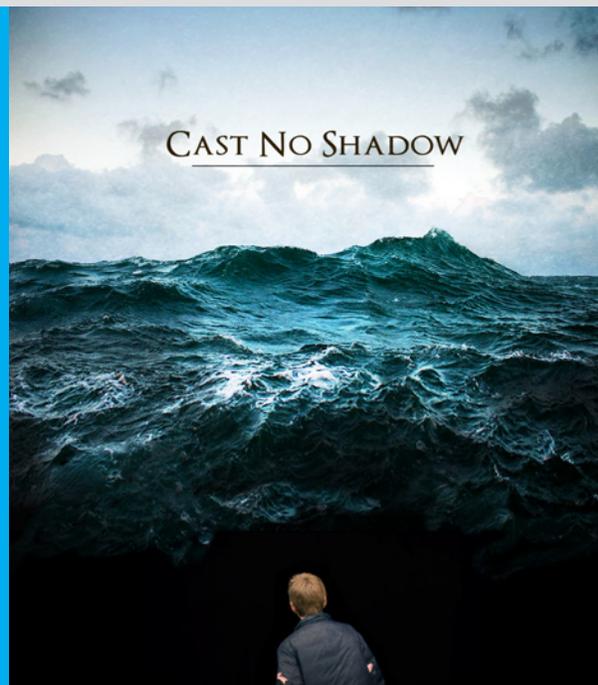


**CASE STUDY** ON MARKETING, DISTRIBUTION AND  
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT USING DIGITAL CHANNELS

# CAST NO SHADOW

A Micro-Budget  
Production Program project  
TELEFILM CANADA



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## INTRODUCTION

The movie *Cast No Shadow* (CNS) is one of several projects to benefit from [Telefilm's Micro-Budget Production Program](#), which provides funds for movies that have a total maximum budget of \$250,000 and aims to stimulate the use of new digital distribution platforms by emerging filmmakers.

*Cast No Shadow* was chosen to highlight a marketing strategy that successfully integrated online marketing within its overall marketing plan. The following case study presents what was learned through this initiative.

## BACKGROUND

In 2014, Director Christian Sparks debuted his first feature film, working with writer and actor Joel Thomas Hynes to adapt a novel into a screenplay which would ultimately become CNS (originally entitled *Crawl/space*).

CNS is a coming-of-age drama-fantasy film that delves into a child's imagination as a coping mechanism to deal with the wrongdoings of his abusive father. Set in Newfoundland, the movie attracted people from all ages. Particularly, the young protagonist opened the door to go after a secondary target market of 14-25 year olds.

CNS also created a marketing and distribution strategy for its film that had a large focus on digital marketing. The film was made available on [Rogers on Demand](#), [Shaw on Demand](#), [iTunes Canada](#), [Super Channel](#) and on Air Canada's enRoute in-flight entertainment package shortly after its theatrical release at select Cineplex theatres.

The film, one of Telefilm's Micro-Budget Production Program projects, made headlines at the 34<sup>th</sup> Atlantic Film Festival Awards, picking up Best Picture, Screenplay, and Director, as well as a win for leading actor Percy Hynes as Best Actor.

## KEY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Budget for third-party support from the outset and know when to utilize it

Film producers on a tight budget might be tempted to take on all aspects of the film production, from screening to editing to marketing. With limited funds available, it is important to know when it is best to outsource marketing tasks to consultants, specialists, or advisors. White and Sparks made a conscientious decision to hire an outside firm to help with PR, sales, and digital marketing – three areas where their knowledge was lacking and, as a result, their time would not have been well spent.

Allocating a portion of the budget to tasks that should be outsourced will ensure a proper source of funding is set aside for activities that might be secondary to production yet critical to the overall success of the film. Further, it is important to stress that that such allocation of an outsourced marketing budget should be done from the start of the project.

### 2. Time the release of content to maximize the impact on viewers

Though there is great benefit in having a two-way online conversation with fans over a long period of time, film producers have to be strategic about releasing promotional items that are specifically meant to drive viewers to a theatre to watch their movie. If the promotional item – be it a trailer, interview, or video – is released too far ahead of the theatre release, the momentum built in viewers to set foot into a theater will quickly disappear. The timing has to be close enough to the premiere that people can act on the call-to-action that such promotional items have.

### 3. Leverage PR on owned social channels to increase visibility

Delivering a good product garners public media attention and plenty of PR that in turn helps with a film's visibility. Knowing how to leverage that positive PR on owned social channels is important; this is where careful monitoring and interaction comes in. Being able to find a unique way to continuously boast about the articles that are being written about a film (without sounding overly self-promotional) is a valuable skill and highly useful tool. Sharing such articles with followers, retweeting, quoting, and publicly thanking the author of an article will amplify the reach of positive PR.

### 4. Use experiential marketing

The CNS team made sure to announce via their social channels that the director, actors, executive producer, and producer would be attending various theatres for Q&A sessions. As a result, these showings sold out as viewers had the unique opportunity to direct their questions to the cast of the film. This kind of differentiating tactic, which is highly uncommon, made the experience stand out in consumers' minds and was uniquely memorable, leading to an audience that is highly engaged.

In addition, the CNS crew had an innovative theatre/digital event release plan that spoke to their progressive marketing tactics. In an effort to bring this unique, interactive element of the Q&A sessions to viewers in other cities, they wanted to stream the movie online, as well as the Q&A, which would have been open to fielding questions from such viewers via text or Twitter. However, due to budget constraints this initiative could not be implemented.

## RESULTS

- CNS accrued an online fan base of roughly 1,500 people, with the movie trailer reaching 12,000 viewers.
- CNS maintained its independence in relation to distribution and was able to launch its movie throughout various Cineplex theatres in Canada. They sold distribution rights to [Super Channel](#), made CNS available on [Rogers on Demand](#), [Shaw on Demand](#), and [iTunes](#), and struck a deal to be on [Air Canada's EnRoute](#) in-flight entertainment package.
- Box office sales amounted to \$30,000.
- In Toronto, the movie remained in theatres for 6 weeks.
- CNS received two prominent international recognitions; one at the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea and the other at the Berlin International Film Festival.

## THE CHALLENGE

The biggest challenge faced by this first feature film was the timing of starting their social media presence. The film only started an active online presence on social media once the film had been finalized and the name of the film had been changed to its current *Cast No Shadow* title. In essence, the film had to try to build a loyal online following, engage an audience base and use online distribution channels to reach their desired audience in a more limited period of time than if they had started an online presence from the get-go of production.

## THE MARKETING STRATEGY

### Highlights

- A wide public relations campaign, including an appearance on *Breakfast Television* in Toronto days before the theatrical release, a spread in the January issue of *Canadian Cinematographer* magazine, and articles in *The Globe and Mail* and *Playback Online*
- Supportive tweets from a number of well-followed influencers, including [ZINDIQ](#) (800,000 followers) and [First Weekend Club](#) (2,700 followers)
- The use of a PR firm and dedicated social media coordinator to manage all social media posts and online paid advertisement campaigns
- A content marketing calendar to schedule all posts and ensure optimization of reach
- A total marketing budget of \$25,000, out of which \$7,500 was paid to the retained PR firm

# TAKEAWAYS FROM CAST NO SHADOW'S MARKETING STRATEGY

## 1. Management of social media and the hiring of a public relations firm

It is important to note that even though the producers of CNS started a Facebook and Twitter page a couple of months after the completion of production, as opposed to starting a social media presence from the beginning of production – an important move that allows for the development of an online momentum and following over a longer period of time – they still garnered a large number of social followers.

As the film approached its theatrical release date, producers Allison White and Chris Agoston and director Christian Sparkes hired a PR firm, [GAT PR](#). This was an important milestone within the marketing strategy and was timed to coincide with the premiere to obtain the widest coverage possible. The producer and director also hired a film consultant, from Marina Cordoni Entertainment, who was crucial in securing not only the theatrical release at select Cineplex theatres but also in closing the deal with Air Canada. This deal of being on Air Canada's in-flight entertainment system provided CNS with unique opportunities to reach niche audiences, additional revenues, and added exposure.

Along with those two main activities, the PR firm also provided a social media coordinator whose main objective was to streamline posts, monitor social media, manage paid campaigns, and create hype on social channels owned by CNS leading up to the film's premiere. The social media coordinator worked on the CNS account from January 2015 until April 2015.

With a content calendar that served as a social media guideline, CNS defined frequency, topics of interest, voice and tone, and creative campaigns that defined the brand online.

## 2. Timing of key content release

Wanting to draw on the momentum that would be generated just weeks before the release, the producers at CNS consciously kept some of the best content for a teaser campaign set to launch about four weeks prior to release. Throughout the campaign, new content was released periodically until the very last day before opening. This content included short clips that introduced the main characters (Appendix 1) and interviews with the characters discussing themes that were parallel with the movie's theme (such as discussing their own scariest dreams).

*"I saved several videos for leading up to the release... Leaving what I thought were the coolest videos to the couple days before, and posts after our opening night." – Allison White, Producer, Cast No Shadow, on timing of content shared*

## 3. Cast appearance and Q&A at the premieres of the film – a taste of experiential marketing

The movie was well received at national and international festivals and the performances by young Percy Hynes White and his real-life father, Joel Thomas Hynes, were particularly well regarded.

Building on this success, the producers put forward a three-city theatrical release whereby the director, producer, executive producer, and actors were present for a Q&A session in Toronto, Halifax, and St. John's (schedule in Appendix 2) that did not compromise despite the limited scope of its audience.

*"The Q&A period was very similar to the kind of Q&A you expect at any film festival" – Allison White, Producer, Cast No Shadow*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Nathalia Porras](#) is a marketing consultant specializing in digital marketing strategies, including social media management, online paid advertising, and content marketing. She founded her own marketing consulting business in Montreal in 2014 after completing an MBA at HEC Montréal.

Nathalia brings 11 years of business experience, helping companies develop marketing and business development plans by setting precise goals, having a well-devised CRM, building an online presence, and expanding reach to specific target audiences. Connect with Nathalia on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/in/nathaliaporras](http://www.linkedin.com/in/nathaliaporras).

Her motto:

*“There is no one-size-fits-all marketing plan or strategy — which is why the best tactics are refined over time by live testing. Experience counts largely, especially in social media & digital marketing.”*

## ABOUT TELEFILM CANADA

*Inspired by talent. Viewed everywhere.*

Created in 1967, Telefilm is dedicated to the cultural, commercial and industrial success of Canada’s audiovisual industry. Through its various funding and promotion programs, Telefilm supports dynamic companies and creative talent here at home and around the world.

Telefilm also makes recommendations regarding the certification of audiovisual treaty coproductions to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, and administers the programs of the Canada Media Fund and the Talent Fund, a private donation initiative. Visit [telefilm.ca](http://telefilm.ca) and follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/telefilm\\_canada](https://twitter.com/telefilm_canada) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/telefilmcanada](http://www.facebook.com/telefilmcanada).

For any questions regarding this study please contact Strategy and Research at [sr@telefilm.ca](mailto:sr@telefilm.ca)

# APPENDIX 1:

## Character clips and teaser videos (3 weeks before theatrical release)

 **Cast No Shadow** with Percy White and Joel Thomas Hynes.  
March 26, 2015 · 🌐

"All the truth of the past that is coming up for Jude is also coming up for Angus now..."  
Meet Angus & discover more about him on April 3.



4.1K Views

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share    📧 Hootlet

👍 34

37 shares

 **Cast No Shadow** with Allan Hawco and 48 others.  
March 30, 2015 · 🌐

"What is it boy? What is it? What are you looking at?"  
Find out from this Friday!

TORONTO – Carlton Cinema  
April 3 – post screening Q&A with actors Joel Thomas Hynes, Percy Hynes White, and producer Chris Agoston  
April 4 – post screening Q&A with director Christian Sparkes, actors Joel Thomas Hynes and Percy Hynes White, and producer Chris Agoston  
HALIFAX – Scotiabank Theatre  
April 3 – post screening Q&A with actor Mary-Colin Chisholm  
April 5 – post screening Q&A with director Christian Sparkes  
ST. JOHN'S – Cinema Mount Pearl  
April 3 – post screening Q&A with director Christian Sparkes and producer Allison White



6.6K Views

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share    📧 Hootlet

👍 87    Top Comments \*

45 shares

## APPENDIX 2:

### Schedule of cast appearances at CNS premiere

#### TORONTO – CARLTON CINEMA

**April 3, 2015** – actors Joel Thomas Hynes, Percy Hynes White, and producer Chris Agoston

**April 4, 2015** – director Christian Sparkes, actors Joel Thomas Hynes and Percy Hynes White, and producer Chris Agoston

#### HALIFAX – SCOTIABANK THEATER

**April 3, 2015** – actor Mary-Colin Chrisholm

**April 5, 2015** – director Christian Sparkes

#### ST. JOHN'S – CINEMA MOUNT PEARL

**April 3, 2015** – director Christian Sparkes and producer Allison White

# APPENDIX 3: TIMELINE

## Cast No Shadow – Timeline on Highlights on Marketing Activities and Distribution Plan

	Traditional marketing activities	Digital marketing activities
July 2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook page &amp; Twitter are started</li> </ul>
September 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movie makes it into the <b>Atlantic Film Festival</b> in Halifax: first public release of the movie</li> <li>CNS receives 6 awards: <b>Best Picture, Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Actress</b></li> <li><b>Edmonton International Film Festival</b> for awarding Percy Hynes-White the Rising Star Award (Actor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Festival trailer is released on Vimeo: 21k views</li> <li>Content sharing is started on Facebook and Twitter: behind the scenes and other content is used</li> </ul>
October 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movie is part of the <b>St. John's International Women's Film Festival</b></li> <li>CNS makes its international premiere at <b>BIFF Busan International Film Festival</b> in South Korea</li> </ul>	
January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CNS receives 4 nominations by the <b>Canadian Screen Awards</b></li> </ul>	
March 2015		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2<sup>nd</sup> movie trailer is released on YouTube</li> </ul>
April 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theatre release through Cineplex in Toronto, Halifax and St. John's</li> </ul>	
July 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CNS makes it to the <b>Berlin International Film Festival</b></li> </ul>	
August 2015		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CNS is made available on <b>Rogers on demand, Shaw on demand</b> and <b>iTunes</b></li> </ul>
October 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Movie is sold to <b>Air Canada</b> EnRoute in-flight entertainment system</li> </ul>	

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