

Celluloid-Less Heroes

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Body

The Last Broadcast by Lance Weiler and Stefan Avalos is a clever whodunnit. But more importantly, it is a big, bright sign of the times. Shot on Sony and JVC digital video, Hi 8, and VHS, and edited with Adobe Premiere, the \$900 movie arrives in theaters via satellite as server-based data, not as a print. No celluloid was harmed in the making of this film.

Instead of using traditional delivery methods, filmmakers encoded The Last Broadcast to an MPEG-2 signal, then beamed it from a Network Operations Center (technology by Cyberstar) to a geosynchronous platform satellite 22,300 miles above North America. Upon returning to earth, the signal went through a dish located on theaters, then through cabling to localized Cyberstar servers running Windows NT, and ultimately through a Digital Projection system using Digital Light Processing by Texas Instruments.

While the process has been reported as a "simulcast," this is technically inaccurate. Since the data is available to theaters on servers, the film can be shown at anytime, says Esther Robinson, Weiler and Avalos's partner in Wavelength Releasing, which distributed The Last Broadcast.

"We wanted to steer away from a simulcast because moviegoers aren't going to want to see the movie at the same time all across the country. Theaters are going to want flexibility," says Robinson.

"New technology presents unique opportunity for independents," Robinson continues, adding that filmmakers often have to jump in without a lot of

information. "These technologies are changing every three months. When we decided to do this, we realized that we knew as much as we could have at that moment, which was exhilarating-and horrifying."

So far, The Last Broadcast has shown in Providence, Philadelphia, Orlando, Minneapolis, and Portland, with more cities pending at press time.

"What's really bizarre is that we made this film in the middle of nowhere," says Weiler, who shot in suburban Pennsylvania and rural New Jersey. "We're not in Los Angeles or New York. And yet it's become a catalyst of this digital cinema movement. It's like the little \$900 film that could."

Both Weiler and Robinson agree the film's journey to digital distribution was wrought with opposition.

"There's a huge skepticism about technology," says Robinson, "but there's also incredible resistance to changing the paradigm because the people in power are quite comfortable. But the cool thing about having to fight is you really develop skills. When we started this, I didn't know anything about satellite delivery. But I know a lot now."

Classification

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