



## **IFN on IsumaTV**

*Download-to-Projection Distribution by Internet*

### **INDIGENOUS FILM NETWORK**

Alternative Distribution Program

Telefilm Canada

June 26, 2009



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*Download-to-Projection Distribution by Internet*

SUMMARY

*IFN on IsumaTV* is Canada's first film circuit to distribute Indigenous feature films, documentaries and other independent Canadian films by internet to remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities not served by conventional theatrical distributors. Starting this fall, IFN installs low-cost digital projectors in 25 remote northern communities to screen *Before Tomorrow*, Isuma's third feature film, downloaded from Isuma's new 2.0 multimedia website, IsumaTV [www.isuma.tv].

At the same time, IFN also links a Canada-wide network of 25 existing download-to-projection (D2P) digital screening rooms in locations across southern Canada where Indigenous and independent films get little or no theatrical distribution.

Starting Fall 2009 IFN will distribute *Before Tomorrow* by internet to these 50 D2P alternative theatrical venues. Continuing through spring 2010, in these first 50 rooms and others which may be added, *IFN on IsumaTV* will distribute a weekly schedule of other Inuit, Aboriginal and independent films from Canada and around the world, to a growing global network of D2P digital screening rooms linked by internet to IsumaTV.

*IFN on IsumaTV* achieves three important national objectives in 2009-10:

- Enfranchises 25 remote communities and 25,000 Inuit and Aboriginal Canadians who until now have been excluded from subsidized national theatrical distribution of current Canadian films.
- Advances Inuit and Aboriginal *production* capacity by increasing core audiences for Indigenous films, leading to fairer access to national production subsidies based on distribution performance criteria.
- Develops a made-in-Canada model for D2P download-to-projection delivery of independent films in remote locations where small populations and large distances make conventional distribution impractical or too expensive; or in *any* location where independent films receive little or no attention from conventional 35mm theatrical distributors.



## HISTORY AND RATIONALE: IFN

In 2006-07 with assistance from Telefilm's Alternative Distribution Program and other partners, Isuma created Indigenous Film Network to distribute Isuma's second award-winning feature film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, to remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities lacking conventional theatres.

*The Journals* had opened the 2006 Toronto, Halifax, Calgary and Edmonton International Film Festivals, was selected for the New York Film Festival and won Best Film awards at imagineNATIVE FF (Toronto), American Indian FF (San Francisco) and Alba (Italy) International Film Festival. However, like *Atanarjuat The Fast Runner* released five years earlier, *The Journals* would *not* be screened in any remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities by its Canadian distributor Alliance Atlantis MPD or TIFF Film Circuit's secondary distribution network. For the second time, a unique Inuit film faced the dilemma that its primary audience of Inuit and other Aboriginal viewers, living in fly-in communities without theatres, would be among the last people in Canada to see it.

Isuma created IFN to 'hand-carry' *The Journals* in HD to 80 remote fly-in Indigenous communities. Like an updated version of National Film Board itinerant screenings from the 1940's and 50's, IFN's two-person teams carried a portable HD projector, screen, speakers and a Eureka Media Player hard drive containing *The Journals* and a selection of other short films into local school gyms or community halls. Audiences ranged from fifteen to fifteen hundred people, affected by weather, travel delays of the projection team, or competition from funerals, bingo or other unforeseen variables: 7 months, 80 communities, almost 15,000 viewers with a gross box office value near \$100,000.

IFN brought a current award-winning Canadian independent feature to remote audiences. However, success came at an extremely high cost with little long-term benefit. Canada's fly-in Inuit and Aboriginal communities have some of the highest airfares on earth, routinely over \$2,000 per ticket. Even worse, IFN left no infrastructure behind to view more films. When the teams flew out with the projection kit, the 'digital cinema' flew out on the same plane.

In 2009 Alliance released Isuma's third feature, *Before Tomorrow*, completing the *Fast Runner Trilogy*. *Before Tomorrow* won Best Canadian First Feature at TIFF for co-directors Madeline Ivalu and Marie-Helene Cousineau, was selected for World Drama Competition at Sundance, won Best Film at Victoria, imagineNATIVE and AIFF film festivals, Audience Award at Trento (Italy) International Film Festival and has been invited to open in December at New York's premier art-house cinema, Film Forum. Unfortunately, despite excellent reviews and audience enthusiasm, *Before Tomorrow* received even less conventional distribution than *The Journals*.



Despite the film's popularity, on March 27 Alliance released only four 35mm prints: one each in English in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and one in French in Montreal. After three weeks *Before Tomorrow* mostly disappeared from Canadian theatres entirely. Even more unfortunate, no prints were available for secondary bookings until May, beginning the down time between Film Circuit's Fall and Spring seasons, when even secondary theatres show Hollywood's summer films. Film Circuit's secondary distribution was limited to three screenings of *Before Tomorrow*, despite having booked 82 additional screenings across Canada for *The Journals* three years before.

Three years in the film industry is a long time. Since IFN launched *The Journals*, the industry faces a new technology landscape, severely challenged by new media, digital piracy, VOD, iTunes, Amazon downloads, and an economic recession. In these conditions, independent Canadian films like *Before Tomorrow* and marginally underserved audiences like the North, suffer the most. Without immediate intervention by Isuma and IFN, *Before Tomorrow* may become yet another historic Canadian film praised by the world and seen by few Canadians and hardly any Inuit at all.

While new media, VOD and HD downloads may threaten conventional 35mm theatrical distributors, these same innovations provide new opportunities for new audiences. Following IFN's distribution of *The Journals* in 2006-07, Isuma created IsumaTV, a global interactive networking website for Inuit and Aboriginal multimedia, designed to move toward distribution self-sufficiency for Indigenous films. Launched in 2008 and upgraded to 2.0 with Telefilm CNMF support in 2009, IsumaTV now delivers over 1000 *complete* films in 28 Indigenous languages as well as audio, radio, photos and text, with full interactivity including video commenting.

198 episodes of *Our Dene Elders* as well as hundreds of hours of Isuma and other Inuktitut-language films now can be seen by anyone anywhere with a decent internet connection and a computer, laptop or iPod. Unfortunately, most Inuit, Dene and Cree communities do not have sufficient bandwidth to download IsumaTV's video content. With 7.5 million hits worldwide in its first fifteen months, IsumaTV works great at hi-speed in Toronto, Paris, Helsinki and Beijing, but barely can be seen in Nunavut, Nunavik or NWT communities, schools and homes where they are needed most.

IFN on IsumaTV is an innovative, economical and state-of-the-art solution to two embarrassing problems in Canada's domestic film distribution system: first, the failure to provide northern, remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities with *any* distribution at all; and second, the failure to provide many excellent Canadian independent films with even the modest cross-Canada distribution they deserve. These under-served communities without theatres, and under-served films without dignified distribution, share a common problem: they are off the radar of yesterday's film industry and out of luck.



## INNOVATIVE ALTERNATIVES FOR NORTHERN AUDIENCES

IFN on IsumaTV uses state-of-the-art technology to serve unserved audiences and improve worldwide distribution of Canadian films. IFN uses the internet to link a network of digital screening rooms north and south to distribute high-quality films to low-access communities and individuals who want to see them.

IsumaTV provides Video on Demand top quality downloads in both standard and high definition for digital projection of selected Canadian and international films. To receive and project these films, IFN installs Community Media Stations (CMS) in schools, libraries or community centres in 25 participating Inuit and Aboriginal communities across the North. Each CMS connects a hi-speed internet satellite dish to a local server for upload and download of IsumaTV. CMS servers use a wireless router to send VOD downloads from IsumaTV to a digital projector, broadcast modulator or individual computers and iPods in the school and homes.

IFN on IsumaTV adapts new digital technology to an old Canadian tradition: NFB itinerant screenings with 16mm projectors across Canada, including the weekly 'movie night' in Inuit and Aboriginal communities across the North. Many adults in today's northern communities got their first exposure to the outside world through weekly movies at the community hall. Zacharias Kunuk became Canada's first Inuit filmmaker after seeing John Wayne movies as a child growing up in Igloolik in the 1960's and 70's. Movie Nights in northern communities were discontinued with the introduction of TV. Unlike southern Canada, where television and cinema managed to co-exist, Inuit and Aboriginal communities lost their movies when they gained TV.

IFN on IsumaTV returns film distribution to northern communities lost thirty years ago when satellite TV replaced 16mm projectors. Now adapted to digital technology, northern communities can receive contemporary theatrical feature films through internet D2P projection at the same time southern audiences can see them. Once low cost infrastructure is in place communities can access 1000+ films already uploaded to IsumaTV for additional projections to audiences who want to see them. Besides current releases these can include documentaries, shorts, children's films, oral histories and other priceless content available nowhere else except IsumaTV.

In 2009-10 IFN on IsumaTV will install CMS projection kits in 25 remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities in Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec) and the Northwest Territories. Selection will be conditional on communities sharing the cost of initial equipment, and agreeing to hold not less than one 'movie night' per week. Box office will be split 50/50 between 'exhibitor' and 'distributor,' with IFN as distributor returning 70% of any net revenues after expenses to producers of films shown.



## D2P ALTERNATIVES FOR SOUTHERN AUDIENCES

IFN on IsumaTV offers the same enhanced distribution of *Before Tomorrow* and other Canadian independent and Indigenous films to southern audiences across Canada where excellent and unique films have had little or no theatrical distribution.

No new equipment needs to be installed wherever digital projection is available with high-speed internet. This capacity already exists in a vast array of alternative screening spaces: from high-end digital cinemas to meeting rooms in the local YMCA; in schools, colleges and universities, Native friendship centres or grass-roots art galleries from coast to coast.

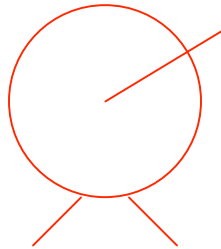
This spring Isuma already has begun linking grass-roots digital screening rooms for D2P download-to-projection screenings from IsumaTV. On May 29, 2009 Isuma presented a two-hour webcast on *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* streamed Live on IsumaTV from Iqaluit, Nunavut. Selected short films were followed by an address by GG Michaele Jean and the 9<sup>th</sup> LaFontaine-Baldwin Lecture by Inuit climate activist and 2007 Nobel nominee, Siila Watt-Cloutier. Available to any viewer on IsumaTV, the two-hour event had D2P projections in seven digital screening rooms across Canada and one each in London, England and Alice Springs, Australia.

In 2009-10 IFN will identify and recruit another 25 screening venues for D2P download-to-projection of Inuit, Aboriginal and other independent films in southern locations. Examples of digital projection venues already contacted or used so far include:

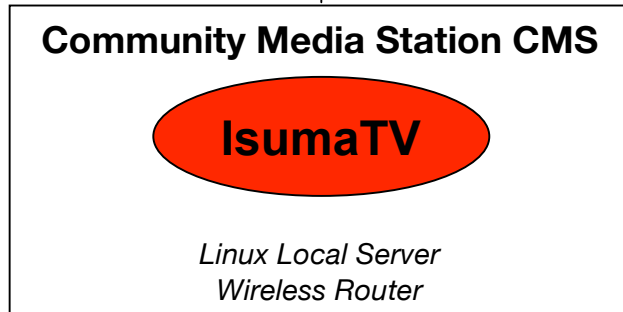
Cinema Space, Segal Centre for the Performing Arts at the Saidye, Montreal  
<http://www.segalcentre.org/en/cinemaspace>  
Vancity Theatre, Vancouver International Film Centre: <http://www.vifc.org/home.html>  
Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg: <http://www.urbanshaman.org/home.html>  
Arusha Centre Society, Calgary: <http://arusha.org/>  
Hart House, U of T, Toronto: <http://www.harthouse.utoronto.ca/>  
Ewola Cinema, Montreal: <http://www.ewola.ca/ewola/main.htm>

## SUMMARY

IFN on IsumaTV builds an alternative distribution network of not less than 50 venues with D2P digital projection from IsumaTV. For films like *Before Tomorrow*, IFN complements conventional distribution in regions not normally served; IFN also provides 'theatrical' distribution for many independent and Indigenous films with no conventional distribution at all. IFN on IsumaTV serves audiences, films and the Canadian distribution system by bringing more Canadian content to more Canadian viewers using new technologies in new ways. By installing permanent low cost infrastructure, and linking existing digital rooms by internet, IFN provides high long term value at very low cost.



**Qiniq, Xplornet or Telsat  
Internet Download**



*Broadcast Modulator*

*Wireless Router*

*Local TV Channel*

*Hi-speed Internet*

**Video Projector**

**Digital Cinema  
Public Projection**  
*Movie Night  
Public Meetings  
Art/Culture Events  
Live Webcasts*



## EPILOGUE

*'What a system!'*





----- Original Message -----

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Before Tomorrow DVD]  
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 10:16:16 -0400  
From: Zacharias Kunuk <zkunuk@isuma.ca>  
To: Norman Cohn cohn@isuma.ca

Sounds like the film system wants us out of business. our audience have no theatres so our films have no audience but we can't be our own distributor so we can't get financed? old theatre distributors block the door and we're squeezed out to what? Inuit features on youtube? Our first shoot, out there on the land videoing polar bear and whales and interviewing hunters and Elders in the community wow is all I could say right now. just imagine Resloute is what I'm looking for. wow is what I could say right now.

what a system.  
ZK

Norman Cohn wrote:

> so how is the shooting going? are you happy? take a look at this.  
>

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Before Tomorrow DVD]  
Date: Tue, 12 May 2009 07:58:55 -0400  
From: Norman Cohn <cohn@isuma.ca>  
To: Mark Slone <mark.slone@alliancefilms.com>  
CC: Claire Zaya <claire.zaya@alliancefilms.com>, Stephane Rituit <stephane@isuma.ca>, Marie-Helene Cousineau <mhcousineau@arnaitvideo.ca>, Lucius Barre <lucius@rcn.com>, "Forget, Dave (TOR)" <ForgetD@telefilm.gc.ca>, "Zak, Agnes M. (TOR)" <zaka@telefilm.gc.ca>, Zacharias Kunuk <zkunuk@isuma.ca>

Dear Mark,

What a system! A terrific audience-pleasing uniquely Canadian film gets 3 and 4 star reviews, wins a top prize at Toronto, is selected for competition at Sundance and invited to Film Forum in New York; and its Canadian distributor gives it a 4-print release (3 English, one French!) and goes to DVD after a hundred days without a single screening in Halifax, Winnipeg, Calgary or Edmonton.

And then you blame the film!

Your comment that Isuma staff, Stephane, Marie-helene and Lucius, were "kept very much informed" and "involved" in this campaign is disingenuous: 4 prints, 3 weeks and no promotion was OUR idea? What could we do about it? I didn't complain before. But going straight to DVD June 23 or July 7 without letting Film Circuit or Isuma ourselves run a decent alternate campaign for the film, is really too much. Your suggestion that Film Circuit wasn't much interested and "declined further bookings" does not reflect the facts. Robin Rhodes wrote me Thursday: "We all certainly really like the film here and our bookers have been pushing it diligently. Unfortunately, because of release timing, and access to very few prints, we weren't able to book the film until April. Most of our groups have to stop screening before the 2nd week of May, as we cannot get them any theatre time during "summer blockbuster" season. Once the groups can get screen time again, it will be September.



Unfortunately, BEFORE TOMORROW will have been released on dvd by then (mid-June, I believe). For the few groups that can screen through the summer, we will endeavour to keep the picture on their radar.

"For us, these films are best served by allowing our groups to programme it for either their winter season (Jan-May) when they begin booking in November, or their fall season (Sept-November) when they begin booking in July. Such was the case with JOURNALS... (and we had several prints to work with) which we did extremely well with. Also, we programme for many smaller Canadian Festivals (still fully considered theatrical releases) that occur between February and March each year. If we could have had the film for these festivals, it would have translated into a lot more seats sold."

4 prints in April, DVD in June, Pay TV in September with no window for The Film Circuit or Isuma in alternate venues... This is a marketing plan of zero expectations, decided in advance of the film's reviews, festival success or real audience potential if well-promoted. Blame the film? I don't think so. "extensive grassroots outreach to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences"? Where was this? "tens of thousands of dollars in advertising"? This phrase speaks for itself. Odeon's Marketing Plan submitted with Before Tomorrow's original Telefilm application proposed 25 prints and a national release. We fulfilled our end of the bargain, what happened to yours?

Norman

Mark Slone wrote:

>  
> Dear Norman  
>  
> I have spoken to Claire who explained that the date for the DVD release  
> was moved to July 7 to respect the traditional window, which is our  
> standard practice. The previous date of June 23 was an oversight. Our  
> apologies for the confusion.  
>  
> Regarding the Film Circuit, we screened the film in February for those  
> on their team that did not see it at a Festival and while they did  
> program a few dates, they declined further bookings. Waiting until the  
> fall is unlikely to change their minds and would impact other windows,  
> particularly pay television.  
>  
> As for the characterization that our work on the theatrical release was  
> limited, I would like ask if Stephane is in agreement with your  
> assessment as he and Marie-Helene were kept very much informed and  
> involved with our extensive plans. As he will tell you, we engaged a  
> top Hollywood firm to design the poster and another to cut the trailer,  
> both of which turned out quite well in my opinion. Stephane and Lucius  
> came to our office for a lengthy meeting with all departments where we  
> presented our strategy for the release, which is what we carried out: in  
> addition to the in theatre materials, we did media sponsored promotional  
> screenings, postcards, extensive grassroots outreach to both Aboriginal  
> and non-Aboriginal audiences, tens of thousands of dollars in  
> advertising, press screenings and feature publicity (the results of  
> which we reported to your office). The English and French releases were  
> programmed into the best cinemas, selected based on our success with  
> Atanarjuat.  
>  
> Unfortunately the film did not exceed commercially in its Toronto,  
> Montreal and Vancouver premieres despite everyone's best efforts in both  
> person hours and money. We gave the filmmakers access to the process and  
> meaningful input, of which they availed themselves. If there were



> concerns, I very much wish they could have been expressed before the  
> release as we would have gladly addressed them. On behalf of the team,  
> we share your disappointment that the results were not better for a film  
> that we and the critics agreed was beautiful and enriching.

>  
> Regards  
> Mark

>  
> On Fri, May 8, 2009 at 1:58 PM, Norman Cohn <cohn@isuma.ca  
> <mailto:cohn@isuma.ca> wrote:

>  
> Dear Mark and Claire,

>  
> I just learned from Stephane Rituit that Alliance is planning a June  
> 23 release date for Before Tomorrow to DVD.

>  
> I find this date shockingly early, being less than 90 days after the  
> film's first release to theatres March 27th. We ask you to delay the  
> DVD release date until mid-fall.

>  
> Alliance's marketing plan submitted originally to Telefilm called  
> for 28 prints. For a film selected at Sundance, winning at TIFF and  
> with consistently good reviews, we found your actual 4-print release  
> and limited promotion last month extremely disappointing.

>  
> Such an early DVD release effectively closes down any further  
> possibility for theatrical release in smaller markets normally  
> served by The Film Circuit or by Isuma's own Indigenous Film Network  
> in remote Inuit and Aboriginal communities.

>  
> Apparently, Alliance's small number of prints made it impossible for  
> TFC to book more than a few screenings in this year's 'spring  
> season.' Once you release Before Tomorrow to DVD, Film Circuit no  
> longer can book theatrical screenings in their 'fall season' from  
> September to November. You may recall TFC added close to \$100,000 in  
> box office to Alliance's totals for both The Fast Runner in 2002 and  
> The Journals of Knud Rasmussen in 2007. Isuma's northern digital  
> projections added an equal amount to total box office for The Journals.

>  
> If Alliance has no further plans for theatrical distribution beyond  
> its classical Canadian release, at least allow Isuma and The Film  
> Circuit a chance to improve on your box office numbers so far.  
> Holding off the DVD release date for Before Tomorrow can only  
> benefit Alliance as well as the film.

>  
> sincerely,  
> Norman Cohn

>  
> Stephane Rituit wrote:

>  
> For comment.  
> DVD release scheduled June 23.