

Why not stream it? Making Theatre More Accessible.

Introduction

In this project I intend to explore the history, laws, and potential future of streaming theatre events live to individual's homes. I will look at the various kinds of streaming and what kind of effect they have on the environment. I aim to answer questions such as, 'How would live stream performances effect the industry's economy?' 'Is there a need or demand for this?' 'How would this work in theatre?' and 'How much would this cost to run full time?'

I believe that the industry could benefit immensely from live streamed performances as currently there is no way for significant numbers of the population to get to theatres to see live performances. I intend to investigate companies that have live streamed performances in the past and would like to investigate their experiences.

I will be looking into Nielsen Norman studies and intellectual property, as well as copyright laws that affect what shows can and cannot be livestreamed.

Some platforms that offer something similar to what I am proposing are, Hijinx.

Hijinx is a professional theatre company with its base at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, Wales. They are also a touring company, performing at the Glastonbury Festival and Edinburgh Festivals, and tour also small-scale theatres throughout the UK and Europe. The cast includes actors with and without learning and physical disabilities.

The BBC: BBC iPlayer is a video on demand service from the BBC. The service is available on a wide range of devices, including mobile phones and tablets, personal computers, and smart televisions.

Cineworld: Event cinema is the screening of live or pre-recorded entertainment in movie theatres, such as concerts, plays, opera, ballet, musicals, sports, and more. Event cinema is often released as a one- or two-night-only event, but some popular titles may have a longer run.

Digital Theatre: Digital Theatre is a company that provides digital platforms for the arts. Founded by Robert Delamere and Tom Shaw and launched in London in 2009, the company produces and licenses high-definition films of stage productions that can be streamed on demand for both consumer and educational purposes.

Marquee TV: Marquee TV accesses hundreds of performances from theatres around the world all for less than the price of lunch. The subscriber gets a virtual

front-row seat to performances at The Royal Opera House, Teatro alla Scala, The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Washington Ballet and more.

BroadwayHD: BroadwayHD is an on-demand digital streaming media company. Based in New York City, the company records and distributes live theatre performances and previously recorded theatrical productions through its platform.

Globe Player: Globe Player is an on-demand streaming service for filmed productions from Shakespeare's Globe. It is available worldwide and can be watched on any internet-connected device, with new plays added throughout the year.

Rationale

I feel that theatre is something that everyone should be able to enjoy, and theatres have already taken steps to make it more accessible to those with disabilities, from offering first entry, a card, much like a cinema one, that allows those that need carers to buy tickets at a discount. But not everyone is able to be attend a theatre and live streaming a performance can help these people experience the magic of live theatre from the comfort of their home without detracting from their enjoyment.

Live streaming

Live streaming is when an audience is able to watch a performance as its being filmed with no editing. This can be broadcast to a specific group of people or to a

worldwide audience. It allows the audience to interact with the streamer using a chat function.

Live streaming sites

A few websites that offer livestreaming option to their users;

- Youtube

Youtube is a website that allows anyone with an account to live stream what they are doing at that moment in time.

- Twitch

A live video site mainly used by gamers to stream their playthroughs of games, allowing people to watch and commentate as they play.

- Dacast

Dacast is a company that allows businesses to host and stream live and on demand

- Zoom

Zoom is a site that allows their patrons to communicate with each other via video, audio, and chat

- Microsoft Teams

Like Zoom, Teams also allows their patrons to host meetings, share files, and chat with others

History of streaming

Live streaming started in the early 1990s when the first media players capable of live streaming were developed. This new technology allowed computer users to watch audio and video content in real time, changing how we consume entertainment. One of the first live-streamed events was a music concert, a big step for streaming. A baseball game was also live streamed using RealPlayer by RealNetworks, Inc. This showed how live streaming could bring live sports to computer screens worldwide. The year 2005 was another big year for live streaming. The emergence of YouTube opened new opportunities for streaming video. In 2008, YouTube live hosted its first live-stream event. This was a notable change because anyone with a computer and internet connection could watch live events from anywhere in the world. In 2011, a platform called Twitch started live-streaming video games. This was a huge hit and showed that live streaming was not just for traditional streaming media like music and sports. It could also be used for video games, a form of entertainment enjoyed by millions of people worldwide. As the years went on, other social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram also introduced live-streaming capabilities. This made live streaming even more popular and widely used. Live streaming is used for many purposes, including communication, entertainment, and marketing strategies. It is safe to say

that the live-streaming industry has come a long way since its humble beginnings, to the golden age of streaming we see today; it has been a journey full of modern technology and innovation. One of the biggest changes in the live streaming industry was the introduction of the Content Delivery Network. (CDN) This modern technology has transformed the way we stream content. It is even common to use multiple CDNs at the same time now. This just goes to show how important these networks are for the streaming platforms we use every day. Another big trend in live streaming is multi-streaming, this means broadcasting the same live event on multiple platforms at the same time. Whether it is a baseball game or a video game tournament, viewers can watch the live broadcast from their favorite platform. This could be Twitch Live, YouTube Live, Facebook Live, Amazon Prime Video, or any of the other platforms out there. One of the biggest challenges in live streaming has always been latency - that annoying delay between the live video and what you see on your screen. But ultra-low latency and sub-second latency technology has solved this problem. This makes the experience much better for the audience whether computer users or mobile users alike. This can be an immense help for live streams that need a lot of preparation. There are also lots of ways to make money from live streaming. Different models have been developed to help content creators earn a living from their streams. This could be through advertising, subscriptions, and even donations from viewers. So, from its early days to the present, live streaming has come a long way. It is a vital part of our internet culture and a major form of entertainment. Whether it is music, video games, or

television shows, live streaming lets us enjoy the content we love in a whole new way.

The laws

Copyright is an intellectual property right which allows you as the holder to dictate how and where your property is used and stops the use of your property without your permission. It provides rights for copyright holders in respect of their works including a right to royalties and to restrict how their works are reproduced by other people. It can protect works like books, films, music, art, and software from being copied

Key Aspects of Copyright

Automatically Applies - In most countries, copyright protection is automatic once a work is created and in a fixed (written down, recorded, or published).

Fair Use - Some exceptions allow limited use for education, news reporting, and research without permission.

Copyright Law in the UK

In the UK, copyright is controlled by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. It automatically protects original works and gives the creator exclusive rights to use and control their work.

Enforcement & Infringement

Using copyrighted material without permission can lead to legal action, including fines and damages.

Copyright does not protect ideas

Copyright and Streaming (UK Law & Global Considerations)

Streaming involves **transmitting copyrighted content in real-time over the internet** without downloading it permanently. Copyright laws regulate both **legal streaming services** (Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Spotify) and **illegal streaming of copyrighted content**.

Legal Streaming & Copyright

Licensed Services - Platforms like Netflix, Disney+, and Spotify obtain licenses to legally stream copyrighted content.

User-Generated Content - Platforms like YouTube and Twitch use **copyright detection tools (e.g., Content ID)** to prevent unlicensed use of copyrighted material.

Fair Dealing Exceptions (UK) - Limited use of copyrighted material may be allowed for:

Illegal Streaming & Copyright Infringement

Streaming copyrighted content from an unlicensed source (e.g., pirated sports events, films, TV shows) is **illegal** in the UK and many other countries.

Legal Risks of Illegal Streaming:

Watching Streams (Viewers) - In 2017, a landmark UK ruling confirmed that **watching illegal streams can be unlawful**, though prosecutions usually target distributors rather than viewers.

Hosting Streams (Providers) - Running illegal streaming services (e.g., IPTV piracy) can result in **large fines and prison sentences**.

Downloading Streams - Saving or distributing pirated streams is a **direct copyright violation** and more likely to result in legal action.

Grey Areas: Streaming from "Free" Websites

- **Websites offering free movies or sports streams** often violate copyright, even if they claim legality.

- Using VPNs to access geo-blocked content (e.g., US Netflix from the UK) breaches platform terms of service but is not necessarily illegal.

'Reproduction' includes reproducing material in any form which could be printing, copyright works in TV programmes, films, or publications, distributing copies of the work on the internet, or making a copy in 2D or 3D. Copyright protection depends on the nature of the protected work itself. In the case of literary, dramatic, musical, or artistic works copyright generally lasts for the lifetime of the owner plus 70 years after their death or 50 years if the work was computer generated. Copyright in Audio Visual work follows slightly different rules. Broadcasts are protected for 50 years from the date the broadcast is made. Sound recordings are protected for 50 years from the end of the year in which the recording is made or, if published during that period, for 70 years from the end of the year of publication. Films are protected for 70 years following the death of the last of the following: the principal director; the author of the screenplay; the author of the dialogue; or the composer of the original music commissioned for or used in the film.

Bootleg

Bootleg version of performance have become popular in the last few years as they are a easy way to see your favourite show at anytime. However, there are a few downsides to theses videos, one being that recording in theatres is illegal so those that do record these shows go through many lengths to make sure they are not seen recording by both theatre staff and on-stage performers, but that means that these bootleg videos are not of the best quality, often have moments of poor sound and lack a view of both stage and performers. So it would be better for everyone if there was an official recording and/or video of a performance.

Filming in theatre

At a filmed theatre show a crew films so the performance can be shown at a later date. This could be shown on television or be sold as an official recording to the public. Filmed performances aim to capture the authentic flow of the show, however sometimes, especially if being used for an official DVD, you will notice slight discrepancy if it is filmed over several performances.

Filming equipment

Basic equipment used for live streaming is; a camera, a capture card, and a tripod.

Mobility in theatre

For a theatre to be accessible there is a few things that are needed;

- Seating

This includes things like wheelchair spaces and an aisle transfer seat, that is designed with a removable arm rest for easy transference of a person in a wheelchair to and from a seat.

- Parking

Accessibility parking includes a row of parking spaces close to the destination that allows those cars with access a wider space to get in and out of the car.

- Bathrooms

The Equality Act of 2010 require all public bathrooms to also have a disabled toilet. This requirement gives a bigger cubicle so those with wheelchairs can access the cubicles safely.

- Clear signage

Theatres tend to have directional signs but by having them bigger and placed where people tend to get lost can help anyone who may have visual impairments.

- Wheelchair ramps
- And lifts

To aid members of the audience with mobility issues and wheelchair users.

Transport

Theatres tend to be near some form of transport, be that a bus or train station for the convenience of the patrons. However, with these methods of transportation come downside; buses tend to run late, and trains are cancelled for one reason or another, so you must plan for worst case and take an earlier time bus/train. Alternatively, if you are going with friends or family, you could hire a minibus (with a driver) to have a guaranteed time arrival.

Cost of streaming

The cost of live streaming varies depending on what kind of equipment used. For example, you can live stream on a phone. Streaming could cost anywhere between £70 and £130 and that is just for a single camera and capture card.

Stellar

One such website that can be used for streaming, that I have personal experience with, is Stellar. This is a streaming platform I discovered back in November of 2021, it was first made available to the public on Amazon in 2020. I used Stellar in order to watch an overseas production of Ride the Cyclone performed by the Ohio University School of Theatre, Stellar allowed me the opportunity to watch a performance of something I wouldn't get to see normally as well as 'react' to what happened on stage by ways of sending heart and thumbs up through the website. From an audience perspective Stellar offers an easy user experience as well as a wide range of performances and shows to watch from the comfort of your own

home, where you can control the environment. There are many reasons to benefit from Stellar such as if you are not able to stay in a venue for such a long time or from the kind of effects used, like lighting flashes or loud noises. Being home allows you to be in control of these things which makes way for a more comfortable audience experience. I personally don't have much experience of Stellar from a streamers perspective, however, I do know the basics of how it works. Stellar allows you to sell prompt your show buy way of description as well as posters and behind the scene photos, should you wish to use them. There is also an option to sell 'digital merchandise' which would consist of a shows programme like one would buy at the actual show, this also allows those watching through the stream to feel a sense of community with others by being able to purchase the same programme.

Conclusion

The idea of streaming theatre is beneficial to all, both the audience and the company doing the streaming. From an audience perspective, it helps give opportunities to see and watch things you would not normally be able to, whether that's due to distance of the performance or from a personal standpoint, such as not able to stay in a venue for such a long time or from the kind of effects used, like lighting flashes or loud noises. Being home allows you to be in control of these things which makes way for a more comfortable audience experience. From a company point it helps bring in people that would normally not be able to see, which in turn makes more money for the company from the performance they just

watched as well as any future shows they may watch. I feel that this would bring the wider community together and help bring in new people to the community.

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