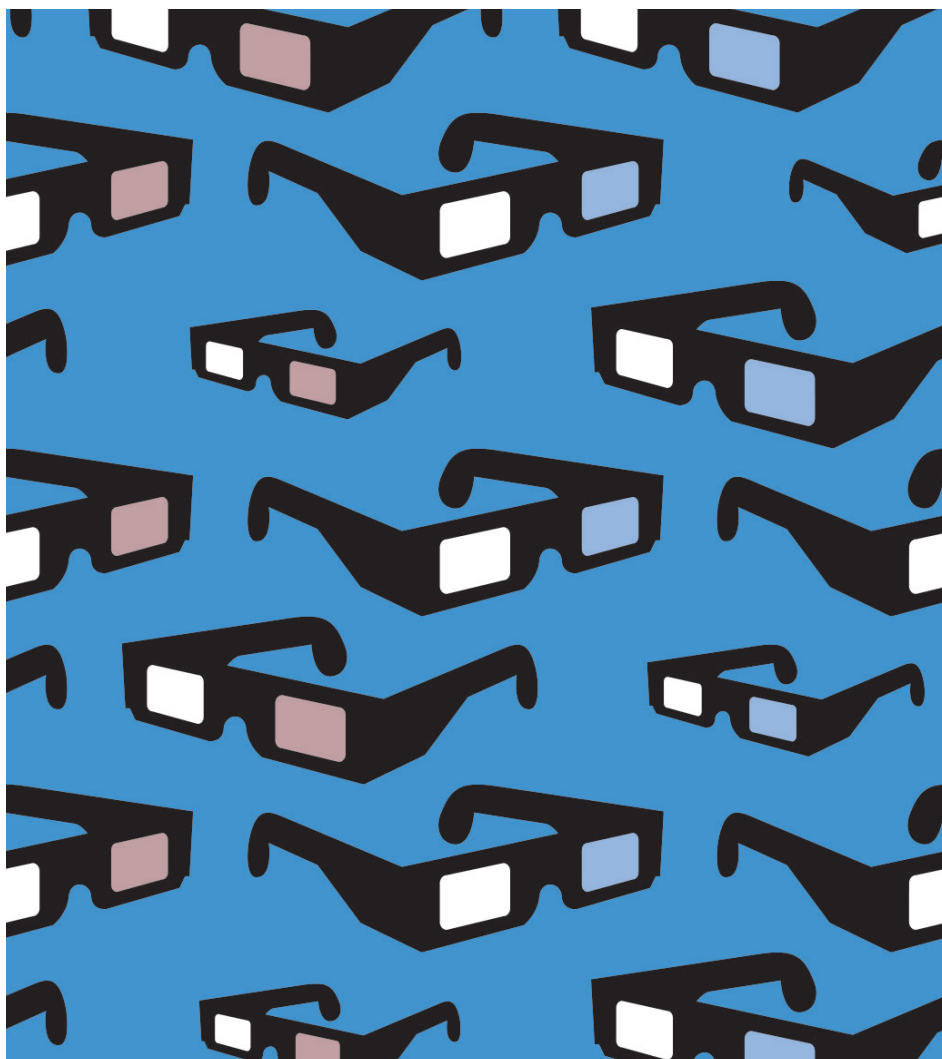


# Legacy in the Making

THE TRIBECA  
FILM FESTIVAL

By 2002, the world was saturated with film festivals, including some very iconic ones: Cannes, Toronto and Sundance. So, while Tribeca was set to launch in that same year, its founders – Craig Hatkoff, Jane Rosenthal and Robert De Niro – knew they would need a purpose beyond being another film festival to succeed. Today, in 2015, Tribeca is one of the premier global festivals. Recently, the Legacy Lab had an opportunity to talk to **Craig Hatkoff** about co-authoring the Tribeca Film Festival's legacy in the making.



Chinatown or the Financial District. Restaurants were going out of business. We did the equivalent of an old-fashioned social media campaign. We organized dinners where a person had to invite 10 more, and they, in turn, had to invite 10 more. We organized it to go to several dozen restaurants in those areas. For the first event, about 800 people showed up. Bill Clinton, Queen Noor and the press showed up. Bob stopped at every restaurant. People realized if we didn't all do something, these restaurants would go out of business. That was the germ of the idea. The moment where we said this could work.

Shortly after, my wife came home and said, 'I talked to Bob and we want to do a festival now.' It was December. Now meant April. It was a crazy idea. But that wasn't going to stop them.

From the outset, the festival wasn't about for profit or not for profit. It was for a purpose. When we started, there was one clear purpose: How do you get people back to normalcy after a terrorist attack? Let's see if we can get 5,000 to 10,000 people back downtown to revive the energy.

## The first thing we would like to talk about is the origin of the Tribeca Film Festival.

■ De Niro and my wife Jane looked at doing a film festival over the years, but there wasn't a hole in what festivals were doing. The

world didn't need another festival. After 9/11, things changed.

As a precursor, we started Dinner Downtown. We did events in October/November of 2001 after the attack on the World Trade Center. There was no one in Little Italy,

## What were the biggest hurdles you had to overcome?

■ In December 2001, there was no business plan. I saw the first budget. It was a million dollars. I thought that was off by a zero. By January, Bob and Jane asked for my business help. Until then, nobody was looking at a serious plan. And lower Manhattan, the festival site, was basically a war zone. I was the outsider—non-film, non-Hollywood, non-celebrity—there to help drive a business.

*“We have always been open to taking risks to discover our real brand elasticity.”*

From a brand standpoint, the idea of raising sponsorship funds in 90 days to put on a multimillion-dollar event was ambitious. We almost failed. We were inside of 24 hours of postponing when two new sponsors called. One was Nancy Smith, VP Global Media, Sponsorship and Events at Amex. Nancy said: ‘Craig, you don’t know me, but I run events for American Express. We hear you are doing a festival. We need to be your partner. We’re going to help you build this.’ On September 11, Amex had to evacuate their headquarters. They were, now, aiming

to bring their employees back the week we were doing the festival. Lower Manhattan is their home. They are a great New York iconic company. They were purpose-driven just like us.

## What were your ongoing goals?

■ At the start, we only thought about year one. Amex had us think ahead into year three. Asking us about our long-term goals back then was a little like asking a child what they wanted to be when they grew up. When people asked about our goals, our aspirations, Bob was candid and humble about saying we were going to figure it out as we go along. We didn’t know what it was going to be, but whatever it was going to be, it was going to be great. I think that’s what helped to build the Tribeca brand: It was very genuine and purpose-driven.

## Other than starting the festival, what risks have you taken along the way?

■ We have always been open to taking risks to discover our real brand elasticity. Early on, we faced a problem with a lack of venues in lower Manhattan. There was one multiplex. How do you put on a festival without theaters? I was a fan of Clayton Christensen’s work. Clay is the father of Disruptive Innovation Theory. At the root of his thinking is the idea that innovation doesn’t have to be perfect; it just has to

be good enough. We all started looking at the festival through this lens. What do you do when there are no existing venues? Embrace constraints and figure it out.

A favorite example of embracing constraints and dealing with the lack of venues is what we did with GM. We started a sort of drive-in using their vehicles. We showed films on a pier for 3,000 to 4,000 people. The next year, GM wanted to power the drive-in with hydrogen. It was not easy to achieve that on the pier five blocks north of the World Trade Center. But, we made it work. The final iteration was a challenge because our drive-in was scheduled the same night as the final episode of *Friends*. So, we came up with the idea to broadcast the final episode at the drive-in. It was probably one of the most memorable experiences. We turned from a drive-in to a hydrogen tower, to broadcasting the last episode of *Friends*. We’re always looking to do the next new thing.

## In what ways has the film festival evolved?

■ I think the festival has evolved to more of a movie festival. If you look at our numbers, the number of people that go to films versus overall attendance, I think 100,000 people can actually see films, based on the inventory of seats. But, we have more like a half million visitors a year. We have the drive-in. We have a family event. We have films for hardcore fanatics who are on

the circuit. I feel we're more of an audience festival than an industry festival. And we want to grow this into more of a culture festival. That's why you see us do things like a short-film festival with Amazon, where the audience judged the films. It was open source—by the people for the people.

### Earlier you mentioned Disruptive Innovation Theory. What role does innovation play?

■ We keep adding innovative ideas into the festival like the Tribeca Disruptive Innovation Awards. There is so much storytelling in innovation, and our festival celebrates storytelling. Whether it is recognizing L.A. Noire, a video game, or making six-second shorts on Vine, or featuring traditional independent and studio films, everything here supports that he who has the best narrative wins.

The reason adding the Disruptive Innovation Awards was interesting to me is that most people in innovation think only of technology, and we thought of it as the intersection between storytelling, culture and technology. We pick very quirky, eclectic, not expected awards that demonstrate the story of innovation, the storytelling behind innovation, and celebrate the winners at the festival.

Why do The Rolling Stones sound the way they do? It was innovation by Keith Richards where he perfected open-G tuning. I don't think

many people thought about open-G tuning where you tune a guitar like a banjo. There is a whole chapter in Keith's book on how he discovered the sound. So Keith, who has great stories to share, is now a Tribeca Disruptive Innovation Award honoree.

### Switching gears, is Tribeca today still an upstart or is it more a part of the establishment?

■ The festival is a mix. Eric Raymond's *The Cathedral and the Bazaar* is one of the most influential things I've read. It's the story of a traditional computer programmer learning how a modern, open source, operating system works. To explain, he introduces a metaphor of cathedrals vs. bazaars. Cathedrals are hierarchical, command and control, lots of sign-offs, long lead times, the product has to be perfect. Bazaars are anarchic, chaotic and noisy. No one is in charge, and everyone is in charge. It's self-governing. We need cathedrals. They are the incumbents, and they do behave predictably. But, the bazaars are taking over. Tribeca is both a cathedral and a huge bazaar.

At Tribeca, the films and the programmers represent a cathedral. That said, through initiatives like the Disruptive Innovation Awards, we are expanding what we mean by film festival. So, when you ask, 'What is the job of Cannes?' the answer is relatively straightforward: to celebrate films and get them sold. Tribeca is more complex. We helped revitalize lower Manhattan. We are trying to help New York. We are trying to get new audiences. We

are trying to be open-minded, even if it's not going to be perfect. We have so many different stakeholders and different jobs that we are trying to do, that it will push itself into more of a bazaar structure. I think the coexistence of cathedrals and bazaars, not where they are fighting but are collaborating, is where you start to get change.

*"We need cathedrals. They are the incumbents, and they do behave predictably. But, the bazaars are taking over. Tribeca is both a cathedral and a huge bazaar."*

### Tell us more about your festival's audiences—your core and emerging ones.

■ Our audience is eclectic. For core films, our festival's prototypical attendee is a 38-year-old

female with a graduate degree in a \$100,000+ HHI demographic. Some other events, like the Disruptive Innovation Awards, are for people who are interested in more than films—the Jack Dorseys, Eric Schmidts of the world—those doing cutting-edge innovation. If you said to me, how does Twyla Tharp fit with a film-going audience?—it's culture and art.

*“This is about **moving forward**. It's about finding new memories in lower Manhattan. The mission is to help people **find meaning** and to **flourish**.”*

How does Pope Francis, the most epic innovator on the planet—and one of our honorees—fit in with the movies? I don't know, but I'm not worried about it. Any CEO trying to turn the ship in the harbor better start putting Pope Francis on their Google alerts. He's turning around a 2,000-year-old brand in ways that were not imaginable without completely destroying the place. We always try to have as many different audiences as we can. The Tribeca Film Festival is a melting pot.

### How does the festival continue to evolve with its audience?

■ The job of the festival is no longer to get people back on the streets of lower Manhattan. We will always honor September 11. But, this is about moving forward. It's about finding new memories in lower Manhattan. The mission is to help people find meaning and to flourish. The things people discover at this festival are things they probably are not going to find anywhere else. There is an enormous amount of permission here to do things they don't normally do. It's a place where you come that is aspirational, and it literally lets everyone own a piece of it. That's part of its energy.

### If one day someone made a movie or wrote a book about the Tribeca Film Festival, what would it be called? What is your brand's enduring legacy?

■ It would be called *Festival*. Festivals aid understanding. They build empathy via storytelling. We have honored Pope Francis. We have a relationship, via the Disruptive Innovation Awards, with Clayton Christensen, who is an elder of the Mormon Church. Another collaborator is an eighth-generation rabbi. Religion was a good delivery system of ethical and moral behavior. But, it's not working so well. So what are new channels to help in a modern, pop culture-y world? Festivals, like Tribeca, can help to cultivate virtues. Most people desire to be a better,

smarter, more empathetic person. Our festival gives a canvas to say that for a week or two, I'm going to step outside quotidian barriers where I get up, go to the office, trade bonds, come home and have dinner. People need to step outside and see all that's going on in the world, both for interior and exterior reasons. In that way, we represent a sort of nontraditional, modern, religious experience.

*After only 14 years, it's remarkable to reflect on what the Tribeca Film Festival has accomplished. As noted at the outset, there wasn't an obvious role for another film festival. So, Tribeca created something rare. Applying some of the tenets of legacy authors, as defined in the Legacy Lab, the festival mobilized an audience around a shared pursuit, elevated its offering by adding aspects of innovation, and activated fans by giving them a part in their production. Versus looking backward, Tribeca's co-founders represent contemporary legacy authors, and the Tribeca Film Festival represents a modern legacy brand that is writing history every day.*

BY MARK MILLER

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