

The Orchard Sales Platform and Security



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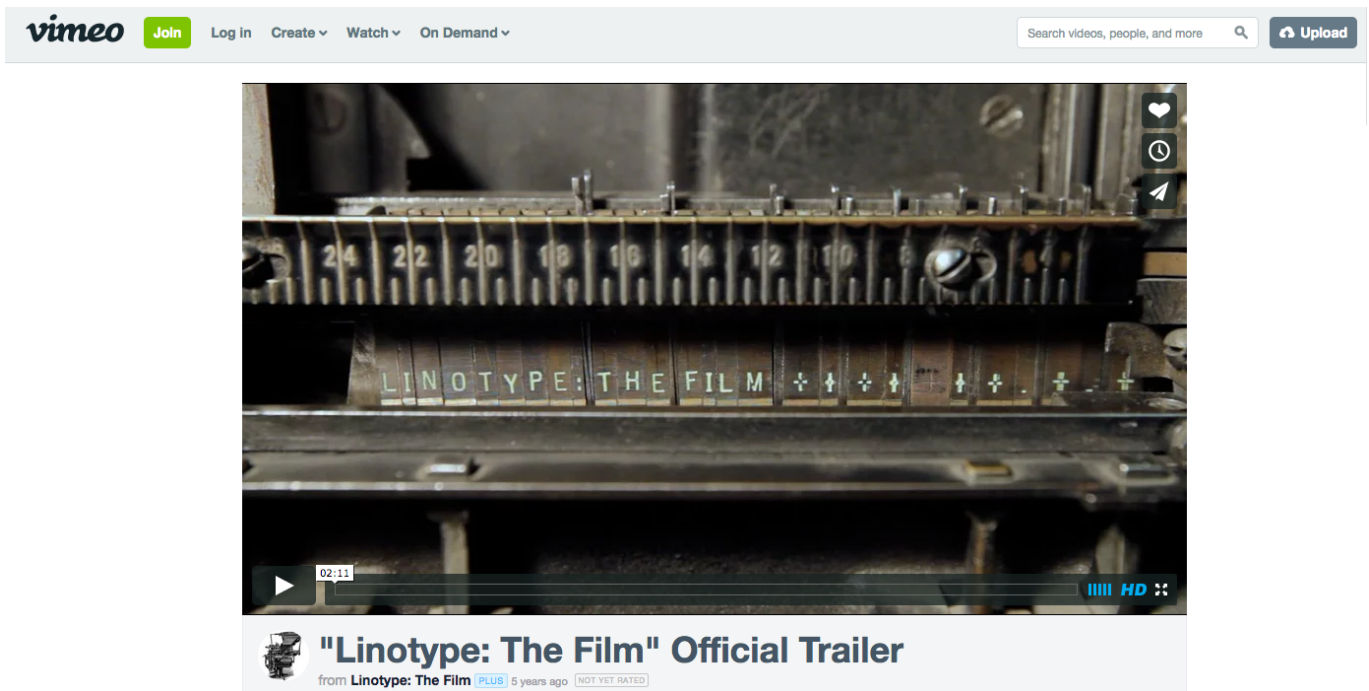


Oct 21, 2015 · 5 min read

The Orchard's film business team had a problem. As the company has scaled up the amount and quality of Film & TV episodes we distribute, it has become a pain to securely share that content with interested parties like our retail partners and the press. This is especially a concern in a world where most films are leaked during their theatrical runs and where large scale hacking of entertainment companies is not uncommon.

The legacy process for sharing films was to upload a screener to Vimeo. The workflow would then be to share a Vimeo URL and password with the person that wanted to screen the content. This process worked fine with one or two films but broke down when we were trying to share a dozen films with the same person. Trying to communicate which of the 10 links they should be viewing first and which password goes with which film was a constant hassle.

The Vimeo method also did not take into account security. The individual that received the Vimeo URL and password could easily share those credentials with friends. In a worst case scenario, it would be pretty easy for a person with low morals to screengrab a film and throw it up on Bittorrent. What's even crazier is that this is the standard industry practice for sharing films in the indie world.



As a Product Manager working with the Film & TV distribution team at The Orchard, this became my problem to solve. I started by asking a bunch of questions and documenting the answers:

- **Who is the user?**

We decided we had two different groups of users: the folks internally that needed to share content and the folks externally that wanted to screen content. We broke down the latter group into members of the press, retail marketers, retail programmers and members of a rating board. We created personas for each of our user type and determined that all of their needs were pretty similar. They wanted a simple way to screen our films on any device, at any time and without having to download additional software.

- **What is their current workflow?**

This lead me down the deep dark path of documenting the screener sharing process on Vimeo.

- **What tools already existed in the market?**

We looked at half a dozen industry tools and evaluated them based on security, price, usability, and ease of integration. We learned a lot throughout the process but no one platform met all of our needs. They were either too secure and costly,

disallowing screeners on mobile and charging per film or they were cheap but had no facility for programmatic integration or security.

- **How do we balance compatibility and security?**

As we dug into the competition we found that a key tradeoff was between compatibility and security. For example, one of screening tools we demoed was extremely compatible, but the watermarking tool they used for security only showed up on the desktop, not mobile devices. In contrast, the most secure screening platform we evaluated had a combination of individual user/pass protection, watermarking and industry standard DRM but could only be used on a PC or Mac, not a tablet or mobile device.

- **Should we build or should we buy?**

Although important, our team already had plenty of projects on our roadmap. Our hope was to handle the integration of the project (i.e. delivering content to the platform) but not actually build out the end user experience.

In the end, we decided to work with a small startup with roots in the entertainment industry. The company had built a platform for the distribution of music video content. They were interested in finding new markets for their software and were willing to work with us for a competitive price.

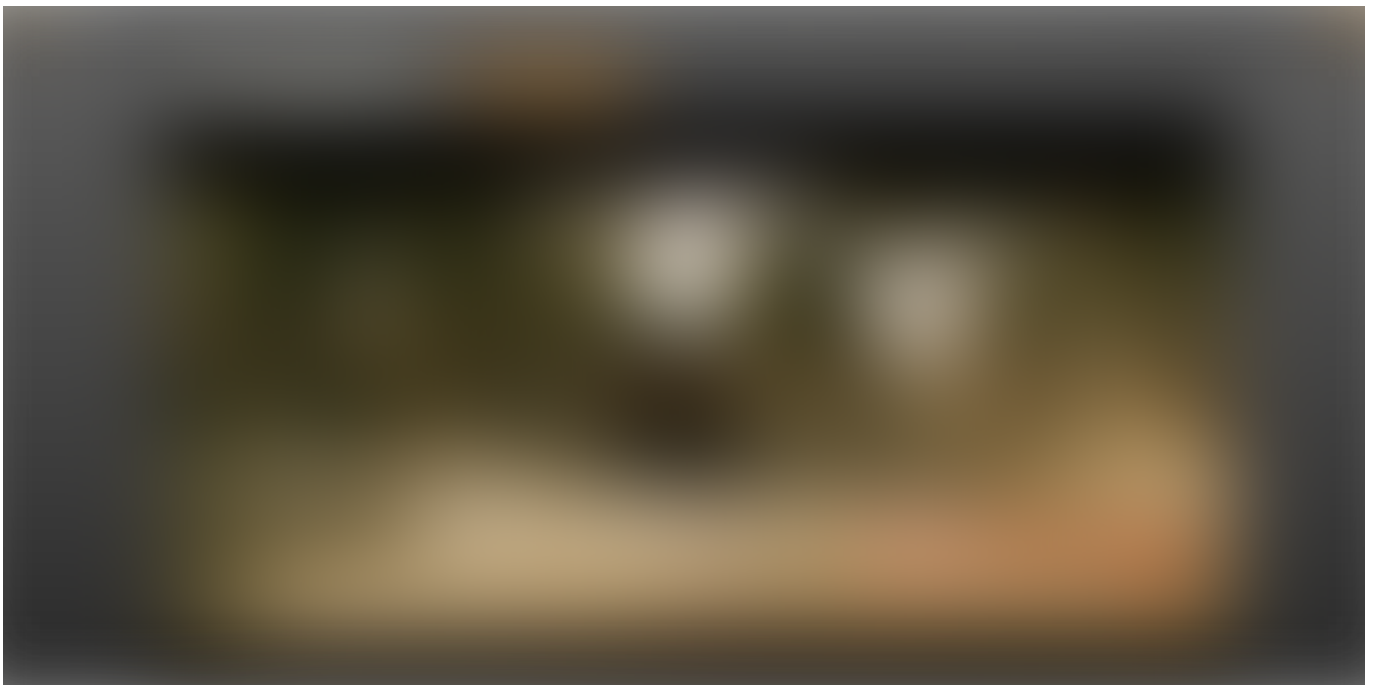
Our primary challenge in determining the scope of work that would turn into the initial launch of The Orchard Screening Room was dealing with the question of compatibility versus security. We know our users wanted to view a film on any device they found convenient. At the same time, we wanted to make our platform as secure as possible.

We decided we were going to create usernames and passwords for users so that the same user could screen multiple films on the platform. In addition, we decided that each user could only screen a film a set number of times and not screen more than one film at the same time, preventing the potential fall out of their credentials being shared on something like social media.

The question that stumped us was how to prevent a user from screen-grabbing a film. We could use DRM, but this would present significant compatibility issues. We could add a watermark, but unless it was specific to each user it wouldn't help much. Our initial research showed that we could create a dynamic watermark with the user's Email

address within the video player. Unfortunately, the watermark would disappear when played on a mobile device when the native player would take over the interface.

In the end, it was the vendor that we were working with that suggested the idea of watermarking the actual video being streamed. This would require us to dynamically transcode small segments of the film with the user's Email address and to insert them as the user screened the film. In a world of cloud computing enabled auto scaling, what might have once been passed on due to the computing power and hardware needed could now be implemented with a few weeks of development time and a few extra dollars a month in our Amazon bill.



The Orchard Screening Room was launched in April 2015. Users who have been invited to the platform can login and screen our films. Feel free to check out a few trailers and tell us what you think!

Ben

Currently listening *Come Back, Deafheaven*

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