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Context to the nugget

Film production is a tricky area where one has to walk the tight rope between creativity (as appreciated by the audience) and commerce. Atul talks about how he thinks about it and also alludes to the evolving consumer mindset where some early opinions could significantly swing the fortunes of the movie one way or the other.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Back to film production. How do you walk that tightrope of creativity and commerce? As a producer, you are solving for commercial returns but at some level you need to ensure that the creative tastes are in line with what the audience needs. As a producer, how do you walk that line?

Atul Kasbekar (AK): In our head, we're redefining. And honestly, we're too new in the business to be giving any kind of *gyan*, but I believe it's in a state of flux and the audience is prepared to listen to alternative points of view. So, I think, in our head what we tell ourselves is a) we want to make a commercial film that we're proud of. It needs to be a commercial film and the definition of a commercial film for us is one that works commercially.

DJ: And is there a sort of predetermined return that you have in mind?

AK: No, you can't. There's no *pundits* in this game. Everybody is an expert after the fact. It's not like, some big massive studio who knows nothing other than making movies and they have been weaned in the business, they don't wake up one day and say, everybody come to the conference room, think of the most crappy idea you have and let's make a gigantic flop. Nobody says that. Everybody thinks that they are making the next 'Sholay' or the next 'Three Idiots,' and there is so much effort that goes into making a single movie that it's traumatic when it gets wiped out of the box office. So, nobody knows. Anyone tells you they know, they don't! Other than Aamir and Salman, there is no such thing as a guaranteed minimum box office draw any more. So, in the same year, you could have two movies with the same actor; one does well and one does not do well. So, even our audience, I think, is in a state of, let's figure out what we want to watch kind of a thing. What the internet has done is that on Friday afternoon, the smell of the movie has gone forth, and a group of people sitting saying, 'Yaar, weekend pe kya karein? Yeh picture dekhein kya? Nahin, yaar, suna hain bahot ghatiya hain. Kya bol rahe ho?' And boom, just like that, your plans have gone haywire. Or they've said, I believe it's damn good, let's go. Now, who would have figured that the biggest grossing Hindi film is a dubbed Telugu film? Let that sink in.

DJ: And what worked in that case, if you had to reflect on that? You're talking about 'Bahubali,' I guess.

AK: Yeah. It's just the scale and you haven't seen a level of VFX like this. It's a full fantasy movie, massive Indian emotions, another level of production, and it worked. Now, the fact of the matter is, that doesn't mean that everybody who spends 300 crores making a film is guaranteed to rake in 1000 NBOC [net box-office collections] at the box office.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of takeaways for me here. The first insight for me here was the point Atul makes about the smell of the movie getting out over the weekend and that influencing outcomes significantly one way or the other. In the hyper connected social world we live in, how we communicate what we want to say has become so critical that it is very easy for significant momentum to build up (positive or negative) based on some initial reactions. This is also relevant at some level in terms of how people think about their personal brand. The second was about saying I don't know to things that are outside's one's control. Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls it Anti-knowledge, which is having humility around what we don't know. Given the number of moving parts, the more we are aware of our anti-knowledge the greater chance we arguably have of moving forward successfully into the future.

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End of nugget transcription

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Atul Kasbekar - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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