

Screen Currency 2026

Understanding the value of
Australian screen and games

A study in 5 reports with
supporting case studies

 Case study

Talk to Me

Feature Film • Released 2023
Causeway Films and Bankside Films



Australian Government



Introduction



Talk to Me is a 2023 Australian horror film directed by twin brothers Danny and Michael Philippou, known online as *RackaRacka*.

Set in Adelaide, South Australia, *Talk to Me* follows a diverse group of teenagers who discover how to conjure spirits using an embalmed hand. They use the hand at house parties, recording seances and distributing the terrifying footage on social media.

The film extends classic horror tropes, playing with the uncertainty of the unknown while modernising them for a digitally native audience. It highlights the convergence between traditional filmmaking and content creation, drawing on the writing and directing teams' experience creating and self-releasing hugely popular horror and comedy content on YouTube.

Part of *Talk to Me*'s immediate success could be attributed to the Philippou brothers' direct relationship with audience. The film's campaign utilised that traction across media with its marketing extending into gaming culture through integration with Fortnite Creative's *Deadpines: Zombie Survival* (a first for a horror film globally) targeting youth audiences with strong crossover interest in gaming. A feature hit with global youth audiences, *Talk to Me* has prompted user-generated responses to the film in over 17 languages. It also achieved significant critical acclaim and sales, from its global premiere at Sundance to selection for Berlinale and South by Southwest (SXSW), and significant response from the industry, cementing Australia's reputation for creating great horror films, now for a digitally connected generation.

Creation

Companies involved

Production company: Causeway Films

Causeway Films was the lead production company behind *Talk to Me*, producing the film in collaboration with the filmmakers Danny and Michael Philippou. The company, founded by Samantha Jennings and Kristina Ceyton, has established itself as one of Australia's leading independent genre production companies, with credits including *The Babadook*, *The Nightingale* and *Cargo*. For *Talk to Me*, Causeway Films worked alongside co-production partner Bankside Films, which also served as the film's international sales agent.¹

Origin story: the idea and initial development

Talk to Me is inspired by an original short film concept by Daley Pearson, which was subsequently developed into a feature by South Australians Danny Philippou and Michael H Beck.²

"*Talk to Me* plays like *The Exorcist* for the social media generation, and the filmmakers cite the 1973 classic as an inspiration."³

Long before they became cult favourites of horror with *Talk to Me*, the Philippou brothers had a global reputation as *RackaRacka*, with an impressive online following of younger viewers. Their YouTube channel boasts close to 7 million subscribers, providing them with an established global fanbase before their move into feature filmmaking. Their early comic-horror videos – described as "backyard bloodbaths that masqueraded as comedy sketches" were chaotic yet formative in producing two of the most in-demand names in the horror genre.

According to Danny Philippou, "All those videos were so helpful to practise different parts of filmmaking ... It was so fun to just have an outlet. You didn't have to apply for funding. We could just do whatever, try things out and see what works."⁴ YouTube served as a decade-long training ground on their path to feature filmmaking, effectively providing a hands-on alternative to film school where they developed skills in camera movement, editing, stunt coordination, sound design and visual effects.

By 2024, they had amassed over 1.5 billion views with 6.5+ million subscribers across their social media channels. They were named in Variety's Fame Changers, ranked fifth on the Australian Financial Review's Cultural Power List and in 2023 were named in In Daily's 40 under 40.⁵

The creative process

Produced by Jennings and Ceyton, founders of Causeway Films, *Talk to Me* is their fourth project supported by the South Australia Film Corporation, following *The Babadook* (2014), *Cargo* (2017) and *The Nightingale* (2018).⁶ As Will Lennox observes in GQ magazine, "Where mainstream horror filmmakers may have inherited templates from studios, the Philippous built theirs from the ground up, using cheap cameras, sweat and their own bones as currency. Even as prestige horror entered a self-serious era, behind the brothers' anarchic sensibility lies the belief that great horror should make you feel something deeper than fright."⁷

The film was wholly produced and post-produced in South Australia, utilising Adelaide Studio facilities and KOJO post-production services with additional locations across Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills. Danny and Michael Philippou have emphasised their commitment to working in their home state and representing authentically Australian stories on screen. "I always want to bring everything back here," Danny says. "It's where we grew up, it's what we know, so the stories to tell are Australian", Michael adds.⁸

This local grounding is complemented by inclusive casting, including Ivorian-Australian actor Sophie Wilde – winner of the AACTA Award for Best Lead Actress in Film – and non-binary actor Zoe Terakes.⁹

Production

Cast and crew metrics

The following IMDb sourced metrics illustrate the breadth and structure of the production workforce.¹⁰

Producers:	18
Directors:	2
Writers:	3
Cinematographers:	1
Composers:	1
Cast:	90
Crew:	228
People with multiple roles:	14

Production financing: investment and presales

Direct supports

Talk to Me received a range of direct public funding supports at both the federal and state level, facilitating its development, production and release.

Screen Australia provided early and sustained funding across multiple stages of the project. In 2019/20, the agency committed \$52,000 in Story Development funding alongside \$1,385,000 in Feature Film Production funding. This support was further supplemented in 2021/22 with a \$215,000 production variation and \$64,400 through the Print and Advertising (P&A) Plus program,¹¹ aimed at supporting marketing and audience reach. In 2022/23, Screen Australia extended its backing with an additional \$300,000 P&A Plus loan, as well

as \$20,000 for International Marketing Support – Festivals and Awards, assisting the film’s global rollout and festival profile.

At the state level, the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC) contributed through its Screen Production Fund, providing grant-based production support. The production also benefited from the South Australian Post-Production, Digital and Visual Effects Rebate (SA PDV Rebate), which incentivised post-production and visual effects work within South Australia and further strengthened the film’s financing structure.

Training and skills

Two SAFC Professional Crew Attachments were undertaken during production of *Talk to Me*, providing emerging practitioners with hands-on industry experience under the mentorship of established department heads. Grace Stewart completed a production manager attachment under the guidance of line producer Carly Maple, gaining exposure to high-level production management processes and on-set coordination. Sonja Van Bavel undertook a set decorator attachment, working closely with production designer Bethany Ryan to develop practical skills in art department execution and design.

These attachments facilitated direct skills transfer within a live production environment, strengthening local industry capability and supporting career pathways for below-the-line talent. As such, the production not only generated employment but also contributed to longer-term capacity building within South Australia’s screen sector.



“It was hard. It took ages, and it almost fell over a number of times, and we ended up having to invest our own fees in it to get it across the line ... at the time when we were trying to finance *Talk to Me*, it was considered a disadvantage because there was a lot of scepticism about YouTubers being able to make films that engaged an audience.”¹²

– Samantha Jennings, producer

Economic impacts

The production delivered a substantial economic contribution to South Australia, driven by both production and post-production activity as well as local employment outcomes.

The production generated \$3,008,050 in South Australian expenditure, excluding PDV, with a further \$92,509 spent on PDV. This brought the total South Australian expenditure to \$3,931,559, demonstrating the project's significant injection of spending across multiple stages of the screen production value chain.

A key component of this impact was employment. The production directly spent \$1,025,924 on the employment of resident South Australians and engaged a total of 211 local cast and crew, including 83 crew members and 128 cast.¹³ This highlights the film's role in supporting local industry capacity, skills development and job creation.

Overall, *Talk to Me* exemplifies how mid-budget feature films can generate meaningful regional economic benefits, stimulating local production ecosystems while maximising the impact of public investment through on-the-ground expenditure and workforce engagement.



Dissemination

Distribution

ANZ distributor:	Umbrella, Maslow & Ahi Entertainment
International sales agent:	Bankside Films
North American distributor:	A24

International sales agent Bankside Films played a key role in the film's early market traction, screening a promotional reel to buyers at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival market. This generated strong interest and led to sales across multiple territories.¹⁴ Notably, while many international rights were secured at this stage, the producers deliberately held back North American rights in anticipation of a major festival premiere and a higher-value distribution outcome.

Following its international premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, this strategy proved successful. The film was acquired for US distribution by A24, a New York-based entertainment company known for high-profile and critically acclaimed titles including *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), *Uncut Gems* (2019), *Midsommar* (2019), HBO's *Euphoria* (2019).¹⁵ As noted by Jennings, securing a distributor of this calibre was a deliberate goal from early in the project's lifecycle, reflecting a clear international market positioning strategy.

“Even though it sold off a promo in Cannes to many territories, we deliberately kept North America because we were hoping it would premiere in Sundance. And then ... a dream was that A24 would see it and like it. So from the very beginning, we were targeting that level of distributor, if not that actual distributor.”¹⁶

– Samantha Jennings, producer.

The film ultimately achieved global reach, being sold into all territories worldwide, with A24 anchoring its North American release.¹⁷

In Australia, *Talk to Me* has been made available across a wide range of digital platforms, including Stan, Netflix, Prime Video, Apple TV, Google Play, YouTube and Fetch.



Australian box office:
\$4.3 million²⁴

Exhibition

Australian box office:	\$4.3 million ¹⁸
Worldwide box office:	US\$93.0 million ¹⁹

Talk to Me had its World Premiere at Sundance Film Festival in January 2023, following a preview screening at the Adelaide Film Festival in 2022. It was 1 of 7 new Australian works selected for the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2023. In 2022/23 it was one of five feature films selected for the *Our Cinema* campaign, a project in collaboration with Screen Australia, distributors and exhibitors that aimed to encourage audiences back into cinemas following the COVID-19 pandemic. The film grossed \$4.3 million domestically²⁰ and went on to earn US\$93 million worldwide.²¹

Awards

Talk To Me received significant domestic and international acclaim, earning 23 awards and 51 nominations across a range of industry and film festival awards.²²

The film won multiple top honours at the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Awards, including Best Film, Best Direction for Danny and Michael Philippou, and Best Lead Actress for Sophie Wilde.

It also secured a Saturn Award for Best Horror Film from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films as well as several awards and nominations from Critics Society.

Renewal

Since the success of *Talk to Me*, A24 has backed the Philippou brothers' second film *Bring Her Back* with further commitment to a third (unnamed) original feature, an upcoming feature documentary and a *Talk to Me* sequel.²³



Distributed in the US by A24, *Talk to Me* became the company's highest-grossing horror film and third-highest-grossing film overall.^{25,26}

Engagement

Online metrics

Selected audience and critic scores are shown below.²⁷

IMDb:	7.1/10
Rotten Tomatoes (critics):	94%
Rotten Tomatoes (audience):	83%
Letterboxd:	3.5/5
Metacritic (general):	76/100
Metacritic (user):	6.9/10

Reception

Following the release of *Talk to Me*, the Philippou brothers attracted significant attention and endorsement from some of the most prominent names in global filmmaking. Directors including Steven Spielberg, Jordan Peele, George Miller and Ari Aster reportedly reached out with messages of support, while Peter Jackson wrote the filmmakers a personal letter. Reflecting on this response, Danny Philippou noted the surreal nature of the recognition, stating, “It always feels really like a dream. It never feels real ... You look up to them all your life.”²⁸

Critical reviews praised the film for its originality and effectiveness as a horror film, as well as its broader significance for Australian screen production. Online reviewer Jeremy Jahns highlighted the filmmakers’ background as YouTubers, framing the film as something fresh new and elevated within the horror genre.²⁹

Mainstream critical reception was equally strong. Times magazine reviewed the film as “the scary movie of the summer”, with critics calling it a “nightmarish collision of the living and the dead” and “an all-out nerve-jangler.” At the time of its release, the film held a 95% score on Rotten Tomatoes, making it the highest-rated horror film of the year. Audience engagement was also evident on social media, with TikTok content related to the film generating over 60 million views.³⁰

Within the Australian context, the film’s success was seen as a notable milestone. As FilmInk observed, “The success of *Talk to Me* is a significant achievement for Australian cinema. It reflects the industry’s growing influence and its ability to produce content that resonates with international audiences. The Philippou twins... have made an impressive transition to the big screen, showcasing their talent and vision in a new and compelling format.”³¹

Australian audiences

Screen Currency audience research results found *Talk to Me* reached 15% of Australians, with markedly higher engagement among younger viewers. It was strongest among Australians aged 16–24 at 28%, followed by 25–34 (24%) and 35–44 (22%), reflecting the film’s resonance with digitally connected youth audiences. Viewership was also elevated among LGBTQIA+ communities (27%), First Nations communities (37%) and culturally diverse communities (27%). Viewership was significantly lower among Australians aged 55–64 (5%) and 65+ (2%).³²

International audiences

As one of the biggest Australian titles in recent years, *Talk to Me* is an important cultural export, representing contemporary multicultural suburban Australia and Adelaide to international audiences.³³

The international audience study conducted for Screen Currency found respondents had significantly higher levels of awareness (19%) for *Talk to Me* in India, and relatively even international awareness across other markets, the second strongest being the US (10%). Other markets – including China, Great Britain, New Zealand, Canada and Singapore – show awareness between 7–9%.³⁴

Online engagement

A significant number of audience reviews across IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes and Letterboxd highlighted the filmmakers’ past as social media content creators and expressed surprise and delight at the quality of their debut film, with an online reviewer writing, “15-year-old me is so happy to see *RackaRacka* go from YouTube to the big screen.”³⁵ The Philippou brothers’ past as YouTubers echoes in fan videos that re-enact or reimagine the possession scenes. Many TikTok users re-edited scenes from the film, changing the tone from horror to comedy or simply adding new or alternate soundtracks.³⁶



15% of Australians report to have watched *Talk to Me*. Viewership is highest among younger Australians aged 16–24 (28%) and 25–34 (24%).³⁷



62% of *Talk to Me* related YouTube and TikTok videos feature user-generated content.³⁸

Advertising innovation

Talk to Me was integrated into the Fortnite Creative's *Deadpines: Zombie Survival*³⁹ title as a marketing strategy, aimed at gaining traction with key audiences. This integration was the first time a horror movie has appeared on the platform globally, with an expected reach of 1 million people.⁴⁰

Social and cultural impacts

Entertainment value

Almost a quarter (24%) of the online comments analysed for Screen Currency's audience research described *Talk to Me* as entertaining.⁴¹ One review from Letterboxd said *Talk to Me* is "a film that successfully captures the existential loneliness that can occur from the loss of a loved one. Although the social insight offered isn't particularly original, it is unquestionably impactful."

Almost a third (32%) of online reviews found that audiences most valued the aesthetic qualities of *Talk to Me*, specifically its contribution to horror cinema. A reviewer from Rotten Tomatoes writes, "Not only does it hit the spot on an incredible number of solid horror points, but it also fits perfectly with the zeitgeist. This includes the use of social media, depression, bullying, and other things that fill people's everyday lives."

Its originality, formal innovation and the directors' technical skills were frequently highlighted, even in otherwise negative reviews.⁴²

Historical and educational value

One in ten (11%) of sampled online comments referenced recognising *Talk to Me* as Australian.⁴³

Some online reviews emphasised the film's place within the tradition of Australian horror cinema, posting "Great to see Australia producing great horror movies again." International reviewers referred to the movie as a gateway to Australian cinema, with a Rotten Tomatoes user stating, "I never knew much about Australian cinema until I saw films like this one."⁴⁴

Social value

Analysis of online commentary revealed extensive audience engagement with *Talk to Me*, including 206,000 IMDb star ratings and 351,000 Letterboxd reviews. Thousands of fan videos have been posted on YouTube and TikTok showing a range of creative responses to the movie's themes, including fan recaps, explainers, parodies, re-enactments, edits, trailers, "kill count" videos and more. Overall, 62% of our YouTube/TikTok sample of *Talk to Me*-related content was user-generated (significantly more than for other case studies analysed for Screen Currency), suggesting widespread fan engagement from a global youth audience. Most videos were in English, but were also found in Spanish, Croatian, Arabic, Turkish, French, Portuguese, Kurdish, Tamil, Bangla, Hindi, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Malayalam, Chinese, Italian, Urdu and Yoruba.⁴⁵

Some reviewers appreciated the nuanced and authentic depiction of youth culture. Letterboxd reviewers found symbolic and social value in the film's exploration of adolescent trauma, noting, "it's a rarity that media concerning youth culture feels this in tune with the situations and emotions they're really going through,"⁴⁶ and expressing appreciation for horror narratives in which "suburban kids are going through something the parents don't understand."⁴⁷ Other kinds of symbolic value that audiences perceived in the film include its "insightful commentary on addiction"⁴⁸ as well as themes of peer pressure and social isolation.

Many Australian viewers found value in seeing their experiences represented authentically on-screen, with one IMDb reviewer writing, "As a child of North Adelaide I can definitely feel the characters as genuine people I'd meet at High School".⁴⁹



"It's a rarity that media concerning youth culture feels this in tune with the situations and emotions they're really going through."⁵⁰

– Online review



"Probably the best Australian horror film to ever exist – pure culture, thrills, gore and disgust."⁵¹

– Online review



"I never knew much about Australian cinema until I saw films like this one."⁵²

– Online review

Other impacts generated by audiences

Talk to Me has given rise to great interest from financiers, distributors, studios and audiences in Australian talent, with much more active interest in Australian debut directors, particularly working in horror. This has led to significant deals for debut horrors such as *Together* and *Leviticus*.⁵³ It also launched the international career of Sophie Wilde, who was widely acclaimed for her performances and has since appeared in films with Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise. The directors also secured a three-picture deal with A24 and have been actively pursued by the world's top studios.

It has also led to an XR series spinoff for Meta, which is in discussions with XRTV about creating a 3D virtual reality sequel.

“The chilling world of A24’s *Talk to Me* will soon enter the realm of immersive storytelling, with an XR series from XRTV and Meta. Shot entirely in 3D, the live-action series will also harness cutting-edge mixed reality technology to map viewers’ environments and immerse them in the story. Described as ‘Euphoria with possession,’ the series will span six half-hour immersive episodes about a group of young travellers chasing the ultimate party on a European island until they discover the Hand, a supernatural high deadlier than any drug.”⁵⁴



“Bringing in a new wave of Australian film ... I think that’s probably the thing I’m personally the most proud of ... because those films are risky, because we do have amazing new talent, because that new generation of voices is really important to access, because I think they do have a commercial sensibility and an international sensibility. So I think that’s a really important part of the ... cultural contribution of the film.”⁵⁵

– Samantha Jennings, producer



Endnotes

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