

# Startup tries to put sociability back into movies

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In this publicity image released by flickme.com, Mitch Galbraith, CEO of flickme.com is shown at the companies' office in San Mateo, Calif. Digital movies might not yet have the equivalent of a theater experience, with roaring crowds chomping on popcorn, but they are getting more social. Studios have increasingly looked to social media and Facebook, in particular, as a distribution platform. The early inroads have been experimental, but social streaming is a bright new hope for a Hollywood looking to counter sagging DVD sales. (AP Photo/flickme.com)

Streaming movies might not yet have the equivalent of a theater experience, with roaring crowds crunching on popcorn, but they are getting more social.

Hollywood studios have increasingly looked to social media and

Facebook, in particular, as a distribution platform. The early inroads have been experimental, but turning social media users into audiences is a bright new hope for a Hollywood looking to counter sagging DVD sales.

On Tuesday, the social streaming startup flickme will launch a library of more than 1,000 movies for rent or purchase with Facebook and Twitter integration. It already has some notable backers: Sony Pictures and Warner Bros. are participating and noted [venture capital firm](#) Sequoia capital has provided funding.

Founded by Mitch Galbraith and Mark Smallcombe, flickme marries the communal element of movies with the social element of the Web. It began with an observation that the movie streaming experiences currently available to users, such as the popular subscription service Netflix, aren't dynamic.

"We sort of had this epiphany where we said, 'This is really transactional and impersonal,'" says Galbraith, CEO of flickme. "You sort of have this environment where you find a movie and watch it and go about your business, but there wasn't much that was very social or fun about the process.

"With all of these inherent social elements of movies as an entertainment form, it was amazing that digital movies had lost that personal, social element."

Though studios have long utilized Facebook as a promotional tool, they only earlier this year began using it to offer movies for rent. In just the last few months, it's been a veritable land rush into the social network.

In August, Miramax's eXperience went live, offering 20 titles to rent on Facebook. Universal Pictures recently launched its Social Theater

application with "The Big Lebowski." Paramount Pictures stepped into the space, making its "Jackass" films available for rental through Facebook. Warner Bros. made the first entry, making a handful of films including "The Dark Knight" available to watch for 30 Facebook credits, or \$3.

Thomas Gewecke, president of Warner Bros. digital distribution, said he's been encouraged by the experiment.

"We're very excited and interested in Facebook as a potential distribution channel for our content," says Gewecke. "(flickme) leverages the strength of the social network and it's also economically interesting to the movie studios. We feel as though there's lots of room for experimentation."

The most notable distinction to flickme is its "sharable discount" feature, which encourages recommendations among friends. Though new releases are offered for \$3.99 and older films for \$2.99, users can rent a film for \$1.49 if a friend recommends it. The discount works for up to 10 friends via [Facebook](#) and Twitter, provided the original viewer pays regular price. About a third of the films on flickme have this offer.

"We feel like a lot of users have the perspective that if they spend tons of time trying to find a movie, they struggle to find what they want, and they may end up watching one that they didn't love, that waste of time is worth way more than a couple of bucks," says Galbraith.

For studios, social media recommendations offer an appealing way to crowd-source the marketing of their catalog.

"After we've released a title and the heat has died down on it some and it's otherwise just sort of out there in the ether, social networks are great opportunities, we think, for consumers to market our titles to one

another," says John Calkins, vice president of global digital and commercial innovation at [Sony Pictures](#) Home Entertainment.

Based in San Mateo, Calif., flickme has a staff of 15. Galbraith and Smallcombe have previously collaborated on two startups and both come from the comedy website Funny or Die. From its founding until January, Galbraith was chief operating officer and Smallcombe was vice president of product and engineering.

The two hope to mirror Funny or Die's combination of Hollywood and Internet culture. Galbraith is working to make more studios and content holders partners and hopes to add more movies to its library. Flickme, [Warner Bros.](#) and Sony declined to give financial details of their arrangement.

"It remains to be seen how much people think about [movies](#) through [social media](#)," says Calkins. "But at least now we're starting to see potentially a proposition that's multistudio, multibrand with a model that's designed to leverage the power of the social network in a way that brings something fresh."

**More information:** <http://flickme.com>

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