



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on December 27, 2014

## “The Interview”: Many Say the Controversy Better Than the Film

Sony Pictures Entertainment released *The Interview* just days after saying the film was dead. All the major chains had refused to show the movie — which depicts a successful assassination attempt on the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un — for fear of a terrorist attack. Now the controversial movie starring Seth Rogen and James Franco is showing anyway. So what’s next?



This may be the first ray of hope for Sony since it was hacked just before Thanksgiving. The cyber-attack crippled computer systems at the entertainment company and allowed hackers to virtually walk off with 100 terabytes of sensitive data and begin leaking it to the Internet and news media. The sensitive data included not only unreleased movies and scripts for upcoming projects, but also personal and financial information about employees and embarrassing e-mails from company executives that have damaged the media giant’s reputation.

Then, in an apparent move to capitalize on their 15 minutes of fame, the hackers — who style themselves as “Guardians of Peace” — threatened a 9/11-style terrorist attack on any theater that showed *The Interview*. Despite the fact that the FBI said there was no credible threat, major theater chains immediately announced that they would not show the film, after which Sony decided not to release it — or so Sony said. But Sony’s reversal of that decision just days later begs the question as to whether Sony was planning to reverse its decision all along to sell tickets to those who would then want to see the movie that was pulled because of the terror threat.

But regardless of whether that was the case, there is no doubt that many — including President Obama — were critical of Sony’s initial decision. In his statement, the president said the entertainment giant made “a mistake” in pulling the film from distribution, because “That’s not who we are. That’s not what America is about.” Obama also said that Sony should have consulted with him before making the decision. “I wish they had spoken to me first,” the president said, as if private companies have to answer to government for the business decisions they make.

After the announcement, executives at Sony found avenues for releasing the film. The deals they have worked out has allowed *The Interview* to be shown in 200 to 300 theaters across the country, as well as by Video On Demand streaming via services such as Google Play, Xbox, YouTube, and others, including



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a dedicated website Sony launched just for this purpose.

In the most recent announcement, Sony Pictures Entertainment CEO Michael Lynton stated,

It has always been Sony's intention to have a national platform on which to release this film. We never stopped pursuing as wide a release as possible for "The Interview." It was essential for our studio to release this movie, especially given the assault upon our business and our employees by those who wanted to stop free speech. We chose the path of digital distribution first so as to reach as many people as possible on opening day, and we continue to seek other partners and platforms to further expand the release. I want to thank Google and Microsoft for helping make this a reality. This release represents our commitment to our filmmakers and free speech. While we couldn't have predicted the road this movie traveled to get to this moment, I'm proud our fight was not for nothing and that cyber-criminals were not able to silence us.

*The Interview* was released Christmas Eve, one day before it was originally scheduled to begin showing in theaters. Though it grossed over \$1 million on Christmas Day, it still has a long way to go to make a profit after clearing the production costs of \$44 million.

All of the controversy and publicity surrounding *The Interview* is undoubtedly enticing some to see the movie who would otherwise be uninterested. But how many is hard to say. And although the controversy may be helping Sony increase viewership for the movie, the reviews should be having the opposite effect since they have not been kind. In fact, many are saying that the controversy surrounding *The Interview* is better than the film itself.

Betsy Sharkey, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, observed that the movie has been elevated "far above what it merits." Kofi Outlaw, in a review for *screenrant.com*, asserted, "For all the controversy, in the end, the funniest thing about *The Interview* may be people's 'Is that what the fuss was about?' response to the finished product." The *Washington Post's* Ann Hornaday says, "Forget 'Is it funny?' The question now is 'Was it worth it?'" And *USA Today's* Claudia Puig remarked, "*The Interview* fails to live up to the hype, floundering as a rowdy comedy as it grows duller by the minute."

The White House issued another statement after it was announced that the film would be released:

The president applauds Sony's decision to authorize screenings of the film. As the president made clear, we're a country that believes in free speech and the right of artistic expression. The decision made by Sony and participating theaters allows people to make their own choices about the film, and we welcome that outcome.

Sony has a long way to go to get out of the woods. Employees are suing over the personal nature of their leaked information; relationships have been damaged by the embarrassing e-mails made public; movies were leaked that have not even been shown in theaters yet; and the overall scandal has damaged Sony Pictures' reputation.

In his statement about the release of *The Interview*, Sony Pictures CEO Michael Lynton spoke of the continuing problems his company is facing:

No doubt the issues we have confronted these last few weeks will not end with this release, but we are gratified to have stood together and confident in our future.

If the reception of *The Interview* is any indication, the company is still in big trouble.

*Photo: AP Images*



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