

each year, it would generate almost £160m in additional box office revenue. Pictured, Cineworld in Ipswich. Picture: ARCHANT LIBRARY



# Drive to the cinema? I'd rather watch TV

**I**t is almost exactly a year since Mrs Lumsden and I last went to the cinema – to see the most recent James Bond movie *Skyfall*. And very entertaining it was too. The fact we haven't been back since is not because I'm mean, or we live like hermits. It's a lot more complicated than that.

Like 99 per cent of the population we don't have a cinema on our doorstep, so it means a drive... so one of us can't drink.

With the cost of petrol, parking, tickets and drinks, it isn't an especially cheap trip out. Nor is it a convenient one, with the timings of the films I may want to see usually being lunchtime or late in the evening with a finish way after my bedtime.

And, frankly, do I really want to watch a movie with the ambient noise of another 100 or so people coughing, spluttering, chewing, slurping, whispering and giggling around me?

To be honest, I'd rather wait three months and watch it on Sky after the distributors have wrung every last penny out of its box office run.

And thereby hangs one of the most serious issues facing the British cinema industry today.

Last year, according to the British Film Institute's own figures, there were 172 million cinema tickets sold nationwide,

The cinema industry is seeing a higher percentage of older customers, but it needs to do more to persuade us out of our armchairs, says **DICK LUMSDEN**

with combined box office takings of £1.1 billion.

That sounds like quite a lot... and it is about 5% up on the previous year. But, for the first time in living memory, the largest group of cinema-goers are the over-45s, who snapped up 36% of all of the tickets sold.

But while that may sound like us older folks are rushing to the cinema, it actually masks the real issue, which is that the younger audiences are declining in comparison.

Most film trailers, and therefore most of the advertising and promotional budgets, are aimed at the 15 to 24-year-olds and focus mainly on things being blown up, cars being trashed, or talking cartoon animals.

But these youngsters already go to the cinema as often as they can afford, so constantly aiming at them is a waste of ammunition.

What the cinema industry should be doing instead is turning their advertising on people like me and Mrs Lumsden who – at one visit in 12 months – are prime candidates.

There are around 25 million

people between 45 and 79 (I don't think an increase in advertising is going to do anything to get the over 80s out to the cinema much more often) and, on average, we go to the cinema between two and three times a year.

It is an urban myth that we only turn out for films like *The King's Speech*, or the *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. And it is equally untrue to believe that younger audiences only like young stars or animations.

The most watched films by the 15-34 age group last year starred Liam Neeson (aged 61), Ray Winstone (56), Woody Harrelson (52), Ciaran Hinds (60), Janet McTeer (52) – and even the most popular film *Ted* was fronted by Mark Wahlberg (42).

There must be scores of films released each year which would appeal to us older viewers, but which are screened with absolutely minimal promotional budgets, so we never know anything about them.

If the cinema industry could persuade all 25 million of us to go to see a film just once more each year, it would generate almost

£160m in additional box office revenue. An extra two trips, generating £320 million, would be an increase of almost a third on the annual takings.

Of course, in addition to telling us what's on and whetting our appetite, they'd have to do something about the nauseating smell of popcorn in the foyer... and they'd have to get rid of all the annoying youngsters in there at the same time as me!

A few cinemas are making the effort with special screenings, combined ticket prices and experimenting with different choices in the foyer... but there isn't much any of them can do about the drive into town.

But I would suggest, that with a huge number of over 45s having cash in their pockets, it would be worth the cinema industry making the effort to galvanise us out of our armchairs and away from Sky. If they managed to persuade Mrs Lumsden and I to turn out twice more, we could even take it in turns to drive!

**■ Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle consumer research, please contact him on [dlumsden@owlms.com](mailto:dlumsden@owlms.com)**