

One of Canada's largest broadcasters called for changes to the public financing and regulatory regime to bolster the export of domestically-produced movies and television shows.

For decades, rules have favored productions aimed at Canadian audiences, and kept foreign competitors at bay, a policy which also meant few Canadian productions were sold to foreign distributors.

But several new online competitors not bound by those rules including US-based firms Netflix, Apple and Google recently began offering downloadable content to Canadians, and are grabbing an increasing share of the market. "We need to ensure that Canadian corporations can count on a regulatory environment that helps them compete on an equal footing with foreign rivals," Serge Sasseville, vice president of Quebecor Media, told a digital media forum organized by the French embassy in Ottawa.

He added: "We believe in a regulator that empowers Canadian corporations to take advantage of the worldwide opportunities afforded by the new digital economy... to bring Canadian content to the world," he added.

"Cultural exports must be at the top of our business, regulatory and financing priorities," Sasseville said. "We must review programs that favor local production to the detriment of projects that could succeed internationally."

As an example, he lamented that Canadian networks can only recoup money invested in an independently-produced show that also received public funding from the domestic market.

Canadian producers, meanwhile, may grant foreign distributors exclusive rights to a show, but cannot offer the same for a Canadian broadcaster's video on-demand service.

Ironically, the increased foreign competition is coming over networks that integrated Canadian media companies such as Quebecor spent billions of dollars developing, Sasseville said.

With respect to the broadcast market, he complained that Internet companies such as Netflix do not have to finance shows about Canadians for Canadians -- something Canadian broadcasters are required to do under the terms of their licensing.