Revisiting the Due South Fan Community on Its Twentieth Anniversary

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Due South: The Series
*Due South* debuted as an April 1994 telemovie simulcast on CTV in Canada and CBS in the United States.

- Developed into an hour-long weekly series for CTV and CBS’s 1994/95 season
- 68 total episodes produced between 1994 and 1998

Produced by Toronto, Ontario-based production company Alliance Communications, *Due South* was one of the first Canadian television shows to air on one of the big three American networks in prime time. In April 1994, the show debuted as a telemovie simulcast on CTV in Canada and CBS in the United States, and was subsequently developed into an hour-long weekly series for broadcast on those same two networks as part of their 1994/95 television season.
Due South’s fish-out-of-water premise revolved around Benton Fraser, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable from the Northwest Territories, who was transferred, along with Diefenbaker, his deaf, lip-reading wolf, to the Canadian Consulate in Chicago. While there, Benton befriended Chicago police detective Ray Vecchio, and together they engaged in weekly adventures. In later episodes, the ghost of Benton’s father frequently appeared to dispense unsolicited advice. Due South’s seemingly simple premise served as the basis for a multi-faceted dramedy: the series poked fun at Canadian and American stereotypes; interwove farcical comedy with film noir; and incorporated an eclectic array of inside jokes and visual puns—some Canadian and some American—which were cleverly inserted into the dialogue. Due South also showcased the music of many Canadian artists such as Sarah McLachlan, Loreena McKennitt, and Stan Rogers.
The roots of *Due South’s* devoted fandom can be traced to the series’ tumultuous run, which was rife with preemptions, schedule shuffles, episodes aired out of sequence, near cancellations and last-minute renewals.
During the spring of 1995, a U.S.-based fan group called the Friends of *Due South* organized a successful Internet-based campaign that helped persuade CBS to reverse its decision to cancel *Due South* following the 1994/95 season. Despite CBS’s permanent cancellation of *Due South* at the end of the 1995/96 season, the show still enjoyed widespread fan support in both the United States and Canada, where it continued to air on CTV’s primetime schedule until 1998. The fans’ repeated efforts to rally support for the series not only gave the otherwise diverse community a united cause, but also fostered communication among the community members on other aspects of *Due South* beyond the “save the show campaigns”.

**Friends of *Due South***

- U.S.-based fan group
- In the spring of 1995, the group organized a successful Internet-based campaign to save *Due South* from cancellation.
- Core *Due South* fan community from which other subsequent subgroups have formed over the past two decades.
In 1996, several Toronto members of the *Due South* mailing list organized a formal fan convention—RCW 139. The convention, named after a recurring license plate seen on *Due South*, was held at a downtown Toronto hotel, and attracted over 200 fans, some of whom ventured from as far away as Australia, New Zealand and England. Meanwhile, fans in Britain, Germany and across the United States who couldn’t attend RCW 139 held their own *Due South* events, which were collectively known as the duesAPOLOOOZA Tour ’96.
The perseverance and devotion of the *Due South* fandom seemingly surprised the show’s producers, television network executives, and even the fans themselves. Indeed, at the time, cyberfandoms were a relatively novel phenomena, and the *Due South* fandom’s founding fortuitously coincided with the rapid expansion of the Internet around the world. By the summer of 1997, *Due South* and its fans, also known as Duesers, had attracted so much attention that then-Toronto mayor Barbara Hall officially proclaimed Friday, August 15th 1997, *Friends of Due South* Day. The Day’s highlights included a celebration in Queen’s Park, which featured appearances by *Due South* star Paul Gross, along with the show’s new co-star Callum Keith Rennie, who had replaced David Marciano following the 1995/96 season, and last but not least, Diefenbaker, the dog. They were joined by hundreds of jubilant *Due South* fans, government dignitaries, and executives from Alliance Communications, as well as several real-life Mounties. In addition, *Friends of Due South* Day participants could try their hand at “the otter toss” and other sundry activities throughout the park designed around a *Due South* theme.
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The *Due South* Fan Community’s First Decade
The loyalty of the *Due South* fan community was once again demonstrated in May of 2001. Almost five years following *Due South*’s exit from primetime television, the show’s fans answered a call for volunteers to serve as “background” for the Paul Gross feature film *Men with Brooms*. The call, posted on the *Due South Listserv*, eventually drew fans from throughout North America to the Brampton Curling Club. Once there, they willingly spent hours sitting on wooden bleachers inside the cold confines of the club. When the cameras rolled, their sole task was to cheer and appear keenly interested in the faux curling matches that were to be used in the film. During breaks, the *Due South* fans chatted among themselves, as well as with various members of curling clubs from Brampton and the surrounding area who had similarly volunteered for the assignment. One member of the *Due South Listserv* also maintained a detailed online journal of each day’s activities for *Due South* fans who were unable to join in the venture.
The following spring, a contingent of the Dueser “background” volunteers traveled to Winnipeg, Manitoba, to attend *Men with Brooms* premiere at Film Exchange—the National Screen Institute’s (NSI) Canadian Film Festival. A number of the volunteers also subsequently attended the film’s premiere in Toronto.
Of course, the Friends of *Due South* Day and participating in a film shoot were out of the ordinary activities even for the *Due South* fan community. In reality, the vast majority of the community’s activities took place online. As an avid *Due South* viewer and an academic interested in computer mediated communication, I decided to undertake a formal research study of *Due South*’s cyberfan community. Valerie Allen, then a colleague of mine at the Pennsylvania State University agreed to assist with the research, which we carried out in 1999. We were particularly interested in learning more demographic details about the Duesers, their *Due South*-related activities, and what attracted them to the show. The study primarily consisted of examining *Due South*-related Web pages and Usenet postings, interviewing selected community, cast and production crew members, and conducting a Web-based fan survey.

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**Major Components of the 1999 *Due South* Fan Community Study**

- Examination of *Due South*-related Web pages and Usenet postings
- Interviews with selected community members, as well as *Due South* cast and production crew members
- Web-based fan survey

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Of course, the Friends of *Due South* Day and participating in a film shoot were out of the ordinary activities even for the *Due South* fan community. In reality, the vast majority of the community’s activities took place online. As an avid *Due South* viewer and an academic interested in computer mediated communication, I decided to undertake a formal research study of *Due South*’s cyberfan community. Valerie Allen, then a colleague of mine at the Pennsylvania State University agreed to assist with the research, which we carried out in 1999. We were particularly interested in learning more demographic details about the Duesers, their *Due South*-related activities, and what attracted them to the show. The study primarily consisted of examining *Due South*-related Web pages and Usenet postings, interviewing selected community, cast and production crew members, and conducting a Web-based fan survey.
As a result of our fan survey, we ultimately received 205 responses from 17 countries across five continents, with respondents ranging from teenagers to individuals in their mid-70s. 78% of the respondents were female; 12% male; and 10% did not identify their gender. Interestingly, the respondents’ reasons for liking Due South varied from enjoying the sly jabs at American and/or Canadian stereotypes to enjoying specific actors or even the show’s soundtrack.
Not surprisingly, the survey results revealed that the *Due South* fan community’s online activities primarily revolved around then-popular Internet tools: Usenet, listservs, Internet Relay chat, and Web pages. Moreover, all of the respondents indicated that they engaged in two or more Internet-based activities.
Since 2014 marked the twentieth anniversary of *Due South*, I thought it would be worthwhile to revisit the *Due South* fan community and examine how it has changed over the years, especially since the 1999 study. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the following questions: (1) Who currently comprises the core membership of *Due South’s* online fan community? (2) How does the modern-day *Due South* community differ in size and character from its 1999 form? and finally, (3) What principal online and face-to-face activities have the members engaged in over the past fifteen years to sustain the community? The new study, which is still underway, consists of a comprehensive survey of contemporary *Due South*-related Web and social media sites; interviews with the creators and/or administrators of selected *Due South* social media and Web content; and lastly, consulting field notes that I have compiled during visits to sundry public events related to *Due South* and/or Paul Gross over the past two decades. Preliminary findings suggest that the *Due South* fan community and the Internet—the community’s primary means of communication—have evolved and diversified concurrently. As for the fans themselves, as time has passed, some have ceased actively participating in the *Due South* community owing to joining other communities devoted to newer shows, refocusing their attention on other pastimes, or leaving owing to illness or death. Nevertheless, the gradual loss of some community members has been for the most part counterbalanced by the inflow of new fans; thus, maintaining the community’s viability. In recent years, new fans have usually learned about *Due South* from their family or friends, via social media posts, via viewing reruns of the show on television, or by being fans of various actors who appeared in *Due South*. 
In 1999 and even today, a sizeable segment of Due South’s fan community reads and/or writes their own stories based upon characters and plotlines from the series. For example, as of September 21, 2014, the Due South FanFiction Archive included 683 stories based upon the series. In addition to basing stories solely on Due South characters, fanfic writers have also frequently combined Due South characters and plotlines with those of various other television series.
Personality clashes and disagreements have periodically erupted within the *Due South* community. Arguably, the most contentious disputes among community members to date has revolved around what sorts of content should be deemed appropriate for a *Due South* fanfic story or, alternately, in listserv and other online posts. One such early disagreement led to the creation of the Usenet group alt.tv.due-south by Annie Keitz and others during the summer of 1995, partly in response to a perceived intolerance among members of the *Due South* listserv. Since then, numerous other members of preexisting *Due South*-related listservs, etc. have formed their own sub communities and/or located other online venues such as Archive of Our Own which accommodate their particular content preferences and social mores.
In recent years, the *Due South* fan community’s online activities, for the most part, have shifted from static Web pages and listservs to social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and YouTube, among others. In most cases, the sites offer an array of content devoted to *Due South*-related topics or actors.
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The *Due South* Fan Community’s Social Media Activities

**Twitter: Selected *Due South*-related Tweets, July 2014**

Emeline @emelinelovesjc Jul 20
Yeeeeeah I'm so happy !! I was looking 4 all songs used in *Due South* and I found a very special one I was searching for a long time !!! Yeees

Iaraenna @Iaraenna Jul 24
Until I started watching *Due South*, I never realized how badly I need a lip-reading, half-wolf Diefenbaker in my life pic.twitter.com/5xXb9SX5ti

Tim O'Shea @talkingwithtim Jul 24
Photoset: ioriansasylum: Time for my annual *Due South* marathon!! God, I love this show. I liked Vecchio,... http://tumblr.co/ZJkg_x1MNqVgU

@Katherine Whitehouse
Finding clips for tonight's youth session. Realising all over again how much I loved *Due South* #

For example, during the three-month period between July and September 2014, up to 20+ tweets per day on Twitter referred specifically to *Due South*. 
Moreover, a cursory review of *Due South*-related tweets, Google searches, and Facebook pages indicates that the show’s popularity still extends beyond North America.
Likewise, fans frequently post their favorite *Due South* scenes, and in some cases, entire episodes of the show on YouTube.
Furthermore, fans with an artistic flair also share their works via social media with the *Due South* community and beyond. Google Image searches for the phrase “Due South” by itself or variously combined with the words fanart, cartoon, and so forth retrieves thousands of images.
Admittedly, *Due South’s* fan community has never reached a size comparable to communities built around numerous other TV shows and movie franchises. Nevertheless, the community’s unique history and endurance afford valuable insights into the long-term maintenance of small to mid-sized fandoms, and the critical role the Internet plays in this evolutionary process. Moreover, the Duesers epitomize how the Internet has reshaped the overall concept of fandoms and individuals’ participation in these communities.
Thank you kindly for your time
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