

An Indie Filmmaking Digest What Works – What Doesn't

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Indie Realities

Be prepared to distribute across several distribution platforms – and be realistic about what works for your film – the channels of distribution change rapidly

– Film Festivals

- Use websites such as Without A Box to submit your film – there are many festivals all over the world besides Sundance

– Online

- Use TubeMogul to distribute and track views of your online films and expect to distribute to several content providers (not just YouTube)

– DVD

- If you are DIY, then expect to budget the cost of producing the DVD and marketing into your expenses – you will want to place ads in industry publications

– Lecture Circuit

- Universities, colleges, schools, libraries and screenings for special interest and community groups are great venues – and often pay

– Mobile

- A new untested market – try to hook up with a mobile content distributor (ie CDBaby.com) with ties to iTunes and Amazon

Always be Nice

- The business runs on personal contacts
- Don't burn any bridges – leave all interactions on a positive note
- Try not to take “no” personally

Consult an Attorney

- Find out your rights and those of others
- If you are seeking investors, a securities attorney can assist you to form legal partnerships that meet SEC requirements
- Ask an entertainment attorney to help you with rights and contracts
- An entertainment attorney may also be a good person to help you make industry contacts

Make Shorts Before You Attempt a Feature

- Learn the process of filmmaking and what you can realistically handle
- Shorts demonstrate proficiency to investors
 - A pilot or proof of concept short may help you obtain funding for a feature
 - Pixar makes shorts to train employees, build teams, test new software and sharpen storytelling skills

Good Script

- A Great Story
- Realistic Dialogue
- Make sure all rights have been cleared if you option someone else's script
- A documentary may need life story rights or other forms of legal protection
- Message needs to be honed by previews, readings and other forms of feedback

Planning – All Phases

- Development
- Pre Production
- Production
- Post Production
- Marketing & Distribution

Think of them as departments that all work together to create a finished product

- You should be working on marketing as soon as the development process is far enough along to present a clear picture of the project
- Production images help sell investors on the story

Do Research

- What similar projects are out there?
- How will your film add to the genre?
- Know your subject
- Market demographics analysis
- Ask an international sales agent about bankable stars if you plan to penetrate the worldwide market

Realistic Expectations for Budget & Funding of Project

- Create a full professional budget
 - What will it cost if everyone is paid at full industry rates and you buy everything at full asking price?
- Create a bare bones budget
 - How much will it *really* take to make this film?
 - Learn to cut costs without impacting quality
 - Be prepared to bargain to get what you need
- Are you prepared to invest your own money, mortgage your house and work for free?

Resources

- Equipment
 - What are your present resources?
 - Do you really need a sexy RED camera or can you make the film on your mobile device?
 - Don't get carried away with technical aspects of filmmaking – what everyone wants is a good story
 - Match equipment to budget
- Location
 - What are your local resources?
 - Can you film in someone's house or do you need a permit to close down a city street?
 - Is this project suitable for guerrilla filmmaking?

Taxes & Incentives

- Should you film locally or travel to another state?
 - Go to Cast & Crew Entertainment Services or EP Incentive Solutions for more information
 - castandcrew.com
 - epincentivesolutions.com
 - Check with your local city film commission to see what they offer
 - San Francisco - www.filmsf.org
 - rebate on city expenses & payroll taxes
 - California - www.film.ca.gov
 - non-refundable tax credit
 - state owned property - no location fees

Producers and Crew Need the Ability to Wear Many Hats

- Real producers worked their way into the job
 - They were actors and/or directors, or
 - They were crew members
- Professional crew members
 - Know the level of detail needed to produce an acceptable product
 - They are able to anticipate a need before it happens
 - Are often capable of multitasking

Always Get Signed Contracts

- Pay people something if you can – volunteers may not show up to do the job
- Be wary of offering percentages from profit revenues – there may not be any
 - ***Never Ever*** use gross revenue percentages!
 - Only **Tom Cruise** has been able to get this from Hollywood!
- Legally enforceable documents are available through your attorney
 - or an online source such as MarkLitwak.com

Make Sure You Have the Rights for Everything in the Film

- Music – don't get your heart set on a Rolling Stones song for your soundtrack – you can't afford it
 - Hire a Music Supervisor to help you if you really must use popular music in your film
 - The Rights Workshop in San Francisco can help you
www.RightsWorkshop.com
 - Hire a qualified composer who has experience scoring film
 - Just because someone is a great musician doesn't mean they can do the job
- Archival images – need clearance just like music
- Be careful with backgrounds – even logos on buses may require clearance

Do NOT Promise Investors “Producer” Titles

- Don't give away any artistic or decision making rights to investors
- The industry frowns on unearned producer credits
- Do hire a professional producer if your production is big enough to need one
 - An Executive Producer is someone who raises the money to make the film through professional contacts – not your best friend who gives you \$1,000.
 - A Line Producer is someone who knows how to put the production together on time and on budget

Work With an Experienced Cast

- Hold auditions
 - Even if you think your best friend is right for the part
- For very small productions you may not need a casting director
 - But if you do, make sure they can get to the contacts you need!
- Even well known actors sometimes need work
 - Be flexible: Angelina Jolie is not the only one who can do the part – unknowns can be a great asset
 - Ask if they will work for scale or under a low budget agreement (see SAG & AFTRA definitions)
 - sag.org aftra.org
 - You may be able to hire a well known actor for a day

Don't Hire Students!

- It doesn't matter what film program they are enrolled in
 - They can't do it (yet)
 - you will end up needing to have it re-done
 - Time is money – students are slower than pros
 - Student work is usually student quality
- Use the Reel Directory (reeldirectory.com) in the Bay Area to find qualified professionals who fit your needs
 - the economy is bad – these people need jobs too

This doesn't mean student work can't ever be good

Shoot on Video – Not Film

- Everyone now accepts video for distribution
 - Film costs are much higher
 - Stock + Processing + Handling costs
 - Film can easily be lost or destroyed
 - Must transfer film to video or file based format for edit
 - Film processing delays add to shoot days
 - Only use film if you are experimenting with that media
 - Video projectors are now cheaper than 35mm projectors and in use worldwide today as the 3D feature market is evolving

You Can't Fix it in Post

- Mistakes are almost always cheaper to re-shoot than fix in post production
 - Plan on at least one shoot after the primary shoots
 - Makeup & costume are fragile
 - Retouch makeup and repair costumes on location
 - Be careful with continuity – mistakes may spoil story and credibility
- New VFX processes must be carefully planned and tested before you go into production
 - Lighting must be perfect and well documented
 - Depth of field must match effect needs

Insurance & Production Services

- Production
 - Must be covered for damages & liability
 - Ask about coverage for automobiles & transportation
- Errors & Omissions
 - A rights error that costs \$1 to fix in script can cost \$1,000,000 in damages after release
- Payroll
 - A payroll service will take care of all workers comp, unemployment, disability & medical insurance as well as union dues and pension funds