

6 Film Distribution Myths You Need to Know

Description

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By Jerome Courshon

One of the major Achillesâ?? heels for film producers and directors is the distribution game. Once youâ??ve made your movie, what do you do? How do you play the game? What strategies do you employ? Is there even a strategy?

Well, thereâ??s good news and bad news. The good news is there are indeed strategies to use and employ. The bad news is that most filmmakers donâ??t know what they are, and flounder around trying to figure them out. Whatâ??s even worse is too many filmmakers throwing in the towel and just dumping their film online, hoping it â??hitsâ?• somehow.

Myth #1: Iâ??m a director, a filmmaker, a creative person. Telling stories is my thing and if I make a good movie, I donâ??t have to worry about the business stuff or the marketing because someone else will do that.

Truth #1: There are of course some people who get lucky and either have a producing partner who does all the business & marketing (and is good at it), or they have the money to hire the right people to do everything.

However for most this isnâ??t the case, especially if oneâ??s film career is in the early stages. You need to become a businessperson once your movie or documentary is done. At least until itâ??s sold *(or until youâ??re done selling if youâ??re DIYâ??ing it).*

Why?

Because distribution is business, and distributors donâ??t care if youâ??ve made the greatest indie film/art film/documentary of the past 20 years. What they care about is if it will make them money. *(And your audience, if youâ??re DIYâ??ing your film, needs to believe theyâ??ll be sufficiently entertained*

and/or enlightened before theyâ??ll buy a DVD or pay to watch it online.) The **more** you can become a â??salespersonâ?• and marketing maven, the **more** success you will have on your quest for distribution or sales.

Yes, I know this part isnâ??t nearly as sexy and fun as making movies and can be downright boring at times. But what Orson Welles famously said about the film business is still true today: â??Itâ??s about 2% moviemaking and 98% hustling.â?•

Myth #2: Distributors are calling me and theyâ??re excited to see my movie! Iâ??ll send it to them and if they like it, theyâ??ll acquire it!

Truth #2: All major distributors track the movies that have been listed in the trades under their production columns. If you were in those columns, youâ??re going to be phoned. Do **not** send them a rough cut. Do **not** send them a final cut. Do **not** send them the movie. If you do, you will not get a theatrical distribution deal, if this is what you are aiming for.

You must â??unveilâ?• your movie in the right place at the right time, such as a **top** film festival, to get the theatrical buyers to **really** want your feature. Movies do not get picked up for theatrical releases that have been sent on a DVD to a distributor. So when they call asking to see a screener, youâ??ll say â??Itâ??s not ready, but I appreciate your call. Check back with me in a month or two.â?• *(And youâ??ll do this every time they call, until youâ??re ready for the grand unveiling.)*

Myth #3: My movie was selected for the Sundance Film Festival! Woohooo! All I have to do is show up and I will get a deal!

Truth #3: Okay, you won the lottery and got a slot at one of the top three film festivals (Sundance, Toronto, Cannes) for your movie premiere. Guess what? Your work hasnâ??t even begun yet. You now must assemble a team of people: a PR firm, an agent from one of the top agencies in Los Angeles, an attorney, and possibly a producerâ??s rep. (But bewareâ?¦most producerâ??s reps are useless.)

You will have to work, strategize and position your movie, before it premieres, as a very desirable movie that distributors must have. You have one shot at the top festivals for a theatrical deal, so donâ??t piss it away. Unfortunately, most filmmakers donâ??t know or understand this. They get a slot at Sundance or Toronto, donâ??t assemble a team or promote their film properly, and then come away without a deal and are entirely lost as to their next step.

Myth #4: I was rejected by the top festivals, so now Iâ??m submitting and getting accepted by the next tier of festivals. This is cool. All I have to do is show up to my screenings and Iâ??m treated like a rock star. Distribution, here I come!

Truth #4: Yeah, okay, if this is you, at least youâ??re having fun. But youâ??re **not** going to get distribution this way. There is a **real** purpose to the festival circuit beyond the top festivals that most people, even Hollywood veterans, simply do not understand. The obvious purpose is, of course, exposure. But there is actually a MORE important purpose: Building a Pedigree.

What is a Pedigree?

It is an accumulation of press coverage, interviews, quotes from critics, and awards if you can get them, which says you have a winning movie on your hands. Once you methodically build this pedigree, which takes some work on the festival circuit, you are then ready to parlay this into a distribution deal (or healthy sales). Itâ??s a simple concept that most do not grasp; yet it is **extremely powerful and effective** for independent films that donâ??t get into the top festivals. There is real psychology involved in the â??artâ?• of selling a movie or documentary. Ignore at your own risk. However, if you learn this â??art,â?• you will have success.

Myth #5: Iâ??ve submitted my movie to the 15 home video companies out there. Iâ??ve even talked to producer friends and looked at industry reference books for whom to submit to. If these 15 companies say â??No,â?? Iâ??m out of luck for a home video deal.

Truth #5: This truth right here may be worth serious dollars to you. There are literally over 100 home video companies in the marketplace, all operating under their own labels. On top of that are additional companies that pick up movies and programming that have output deals with these distributors. So if you think youâ??ve exhausted your search for a home video deal and have only contacted a handful of companies, youâ??ve simply just begun.

And donâ??t buy the occasional diatribe out there that DVD is dead. Itâ??s not. It is still the largest revenue generating segment of the entire film industry. Last year alone, it generated $16-17 billion in revenues. Thatâ??s billion with a â??B.â??

Myth #6: Iâ??m going to bypass traditional distribution altogether, sell my movie on the internet myself and make a ton of money from DVD sales and digital streaming (VOD).

Truth #6: Not likely. For every 5000 movies being made every year, there are less than 20 who make serious money this way. WHY? Itâ??s hard work. It takes time (a lot of it), it takes specific strategies, and you become the de facto distributor for a good year, if not longer. Which isnâ??t an exciting proposition for most filmmakers, whoâ??ve already been on a lengthy and arduous journey of making their film.

However, some who go this route do it **very** successfully. Theyâ??re either great at marketing already, or great learners. And theyâ??re very committed to achieving success, so they really do what it takes to win. Also, the budget of your movie can dictate if this route is viable for you. If youâ??ve made a $10,000 movie, itâ??s not that difficult to recoup this amount, with some decent work. But if your budget was $1 million, good luck making your money back using only the internet. Youâ??ll either need traditional distribution, or a hybrid approach of **both** traditional and non-traditional.

So these are a few of the popular and misleading myths out there, and the truth about them. With 5000 (or more) movies being made every single year, thatâ??s a lot of producers and directors working with often erroneous information. Not to mention an overwhelming number of movies vying for a limited number of distribution slots. These two factors combined can make for a daunting journey filled with frustration and failure.

The silver lining however, is that with the right knowledge, coupled with dedicated and diligent work, anyone with a decent film can achieve success. **Anyone.** But it does take the **right knowledge**. You do not have to have star names in your movie to get a deal or have success, and your movie does not have to be phenomenal. If itâ??s at least decent, you do have a real shot.

Want to learn more about the secrets to distribution? Click here for more information and to purchase Jerome Courshonâ??s DVD Set The Secrets to Distribution: Get Your Movie Distributed Now!

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