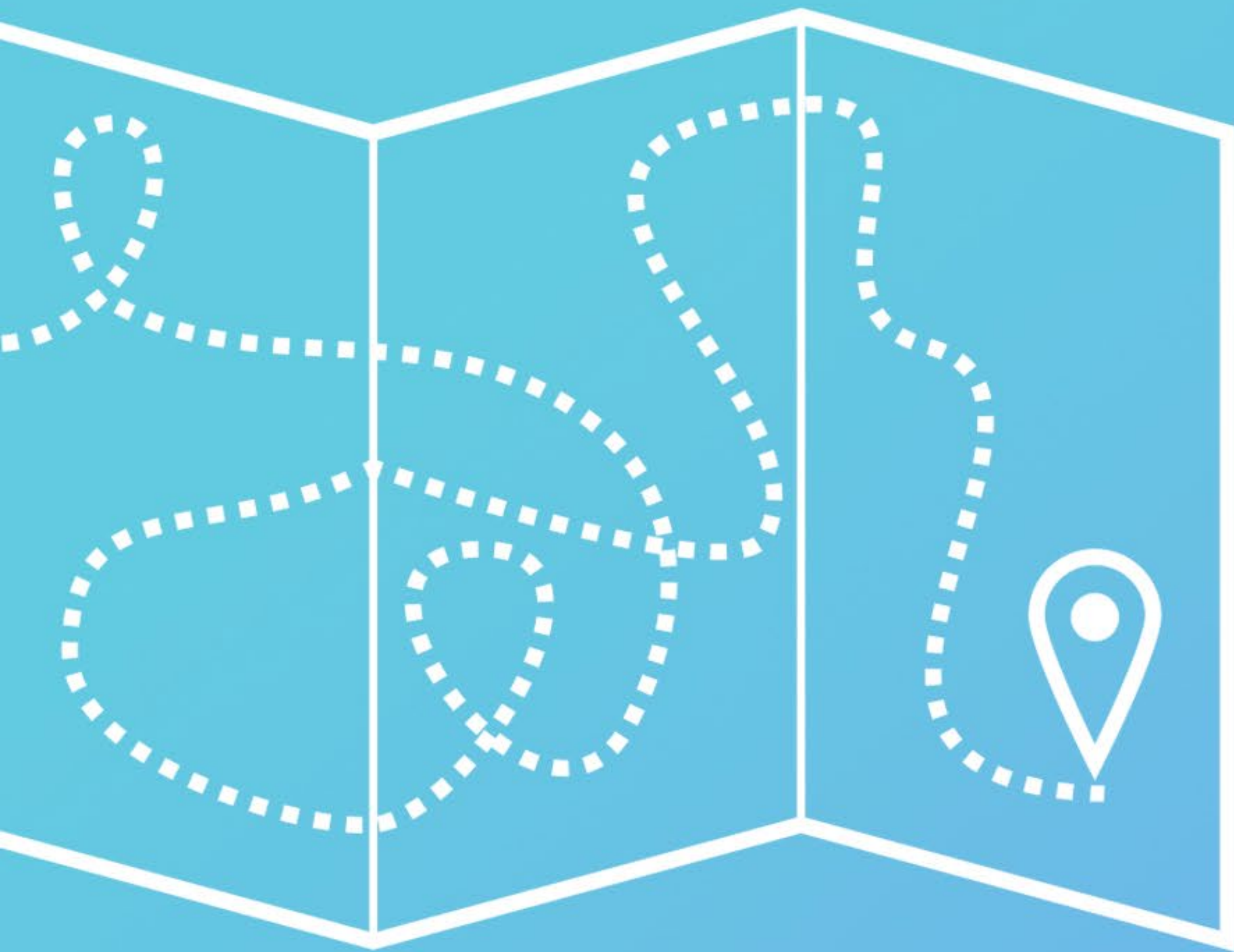


The Distribution Handbook



from **SEED & SPARK**

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS INDEPENDENT FILM?

Simple question, right? It would be if it were still the '90s. As a category, "Independent Film" ostensibly includes any film that is not produced by one of the major Hollywood studios. It also has the connotation of being edgier, grittier, and more artistic.

So, what happened? Mini-majors like Lionsgate, Focus Features, The Weinstein Company, Sony Pictures Classics, and Fox Searchlight came into the space. These companies were able to claim they were "independent film companies," while having the resources to pour millions and millions of dollars into their releases.

What does that mean for you? Well, suddenly the pool of "independent" film got a lot muddier. While platforms like iTunes and Netflix created a specific space for "Independent Films" (meaning those truly free, gritty, dirty, unique films), they began to fill them with content from the mini-majors—movies with millions of dollars behind them. Which means that TRULY independent films are competing with these "independent films."

So how do we, as truly independent filmmakers with small budgets and great actors (but not stars) possibly compete? There are more films being distributed than ever before, aided by the rise of digital platforms that have an endless capacity for content. There are more distributors than ever before because digital distribution is far cheaper and easier than traditional theatrical distribution ever was. There are more platforms going up every day, because "digital

consumption” is all people talk about nowadays. That means there is more audience confusion than ever: where do they go, how do they spend their money and time, how do they know it will be good?

There is more opportunity than ever before to connect with audiences, but it requires a new way of going to work getting your film (or series) out there.

And we are here to help!

The Distribution Landscape

What is the “proper” way to release a film these days? Do you need a theatrical? Is VOD a digital graveyard for your film? What is “day and date” and do I need to do it? Distribution is a tricky business for sure. And there are largely not hard and fast answers to strategy. Like snowflakes, good distribution strategy should be unique to each film. Here we outline some of the core principles of modern distribution, in the hopes of helping you navigate the many tributaries of the River of Film Releases.

THEATRICAL

Theatrical releases come in all shapes in sizes from thousands of theaters to one or two. Theatricals can be great ways to do live events, galvanize audiences, and of course, never a negligible thing to see your film on a big screen. But theatricals can be costly and difficult to maintain. How do you know if you need one?

A better question to ask may be, do you **want** a theatrical release? If the answer is yes, the next question is why? In terms of financial reasons, there is a lot of literature surrounding the notion of a day and date release (when a film launches on VOD the same day it goes out in theaters). The benefits of the day and date is that you can concentrate all of your exposure around one launch date, the film goes out at a higher price point in the VOD space, and hopefully, the film gets added exposure as a “Theatrical Release” within the VOD space.

That being said, the day and date model has become a very competitive mar-

ket, as companies like Lionsgate, Focus Features, and many others have created whole divisions within their departments to focus solely on day and date releases. Much like the term “independent film,” the term, “day and date” has stopped meaning truly independent film, and started to mean sub-studio film releases with millions of marketing dollars behind them.

There are many cost effective and innovative ways to execute a theatrical release that are less focused around getting into numerous theaters (which is a costly and increasingly difficult endeavor), and more focused on building your audience and spreading the word about your film. Not to mention that it’s cool to see your film on the big screen and that’s not a small thing!

[Tugg](#) is a great way to leverage the audience you have built by creating a “Demand It” scenario for your theatrical release. Say you are from Boise, Idaho and want to have a screening for your friends and family. With Tugg, by getting a certain number of people to buy tickets in advance (dependent on the day and city), the screening will occur! It’s a great way to keep theatrical costs down as well as continue to build your audience.

VOD

Video-On-Demand (VOD) Distribution tends to play out in three main windows: the transactional window, the subscription window, and the ad-supported window. Somewhat analogous to a traditional theatrical release, the strategy is that the film is released at its highest price point first through limited channels, and then slowly lowers in price (from the audience perspective) as it releases on more and more platforms.

First window

TRANSACTIONAL VOD: The transactional window is any platform where you can go to buy or rent the film. On the digital side, this includes places like iTunes, Amazon Instant Video, Googleplay, Sony Playstation, Vudu, Vimeo, and Xbox. It also includes direct to consumer platforms (i.e. places where you can play off of your website, like VHX). It also includes your on demand cable window (the On Demand button on a cable system that allows you to rent movies). This should all comprise your first window.

Second window

SUBSCRIPTION VOD/TELEVISION: Subscription VOD is any place where a customer is paying a monthly fee to have access to an unlimited number of films (places like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu Plus for instance). Unlike the transactional platforms, which pay out per transaction, the subscription VOD platforms will play a flat license fee, or in some cases, like IndieFlix, share revenue. Television has become intertwined with this window as well (as Netflix has become an aggressive competitor with places like HBO and Showtime), so this is where a television deal would present itself, too.

Third window

AD-SUPPORTED VOD: Ad-supported VOD is any place where the film is “free” but with ad-breaks within it. The main example of this is Hulu. The film is monetized based on people watching the ads. This usually comes at the tail of end of a film’s release.

SALES AGENTS

Do you need one?

It's not always necessary to bring on a sales agent, but that being said, there are some things to know before looking to bring one on. The role of the sales agent is to get your film a better deal. They have the relationships with festivals, PR companies, and distributors that are intended to put your film in the best position possible. Most work on a commission basis of either an upfront fee out of a distributor's advance on a film or a percentage of whatever the film ultimately makes.

How do you get started? Begin a dialogue by talking to a few companies, asking them how they plan to position your film, how much experience they have with films like yours, and if you can talk to their other clients to see how the experience went. Most distributors these days are willing to make deals directly with filmmakers (and often prefer it), but if you meet a sales company that you really connect with, make them prove why they are worth their commission fee.

This is your movie: no one's going to be a better advocate than you, and you're the only one who can decide if someone seems trustworthy enough to move forward with it. Trust your gut, and get everything you can. You (and your film) deserve it.

Another Alternative: Seed&Spark Distribution

Distribution is something that has always rested in the hands of gatekeepers, with little visibility or data flowing back to filmmakers. A film either was chosen or it wasn't, and it either made money or it didn't with little risk to a distributor, and everything to lose for a filmmaker. Rather than beating our heads on the doors of studios that were built to exclude us, we've needed to build our own path forward. We're 100% focused now on reimagining the studio to deliver sustainability for artists and diversity of content to audiences. This isn't just a business we're building - it has to be a movement.

We're launching a platform-level membership to Seed&Spark for audiences. For \$10/month, our members get access to our entire streaming library of films and series they can't find anywhere else AND they get to allocate \$5 of that each month to a new crowdfunding project of their choice. That means that launching the membership also launched a recurring monthly seed fund for all our crowdfunding projects.

DATA

One of the key things missing from the distribution space is data. Who is actually watching your film and how can you engage with them more directly? We intend to combat the "black hole" of data that filmmakers face, by providing you with everything we can provide about who is watching your film. Where they are located? What else they have watched? What other platforms do they tend to use to watch content? Where they are based geographically-

ly in the country. We want enable you to know your audience so that you are equipped with the most information of how to effectively make your next film.

What does our subscription mean for YOU, the filmmaker?

- You get a dedicated **HOME** for your project, so that you can direct all viewers to one engaging, easy-to-use, enjoyable platform.
- You get a **TEAM** to support you with education and promotion tips, so that you don't have to go it alone.
- You become part of a **COMMUNITY** of filmmakers who are lifting one another up, rather than competing.
- You get **DATA** about who is watching your film, so that you can connect with more of your audiences.
- You get **OWNERSHIP** of your data, your IP, and the future of your film.
- Where we can, and where appropriate, we also help with output deals.

HOW DO WE WORK?

We want to work with filmmakers who are invested in the value of their audience and want to work towards creating their own independent, sustainable careers.

We are not looking for specific genres of film; we are not looking for specific formats - shorts and web series are welcome. Instead, we are looking to partner with filmmakers who are dedicated to quality, filmmakers with innovative voices, and filmmakers excited about collaborating and learning with us.

We pay out based on minutes watched of your film with a 60/40 split in favor of YOU.

OUTPUT DEALS

To qualify for our output deals, you must have run a crowdfunding campaign with us, either for production, marketing, or deliverables. Secondly, we ask that you come to us with at least 1000 followers through your Seed&Spark crowdfunding campaign. If you are already at that point, you can [submit your film](#).

We have direct relationships with the top cable and digital platforms including places like Time Warner, Comcast, iTunes, Hulu, and Netflix. See here for our one sheet on our distribution reach and pricing.

Based on your budget, where you have already built audience, and our distribution expertise, we help you pick which transactional platforms make the most sense for the first window of your film.

From there, we will continue to pitch the film for other opportunities, including television broadcast, Netflix, and Hulu, then we will update you about every opportunity. You are the decision maker on your own film, and we never sign deals without your consent. We are your guide, but you are in charge, every step of the way.

Distribution Strategy Guide

SETTING GOALS

When it comes to distribution, it's very important to know what are realistic goals for the film that you have made. If your goals are to make back gazillions of dollars, get handed a studio deal, and chateau in the South of France, this is not to say it could never happen, but it is likely not the most pertinent goal you could set. For the vast majority of distributors, their goal is to make as much money as possible. This largely means re-framing your film in the context of the marketplace. For instance, if you have made an elegiac character drama with the backdrop of a recent death, will you be ok with your distributor selling it as a fast-paced horror film? Will it make you more money in the marketplace? Possibly. Will it illustrate you accurately as the filmmaker you would like to be? Likely not. It's best to think through these things from the beginning to know your options, outcomes, and consequences, so you can best equip yourself when it comes to making decisions.

Realistic goals could include:

- **Getting visibility for the film:** what are the best platforms and partnerships where I can place the film to find and engage an audience?
- **Make a difference to people:** What are the organizations that could help amplify my message to bring my film to a bigger audience?
- **Be in a position to make another film:** What can I learn from the first experience as to where my successes lie and what people responded to? How can I parlay that into my next film?

CREATING YOUR STRATEGY

Before you get started on your distribution journey, ask yourself...

1. Who is the audience for the movie I have made?

When it comes to distribution, you are going to have to inhabit the role of creative entrepreneur and producer in your head. Obviously you've done your work to make the best film you can but as the producer and advocate of this project, you are going to need to be able to communicate why people should watch it and who will watch it in a more objective way.

Start by taking a hard look at your film. What sort of movie have you made? Is it a drama, horror, or comedy? (Is it an LGBT teen drama, a feminist horror, or a dark comedy about nuclear war? The more specific you can be when answering this question, the more prepared you will be to find its audience.)

Next, find out more about the people who are already engaged. What other films are similar to mine? Who is the audience for those films? What kind of people would be excited for my story? If you've run a crowdfunding campaign, ask yourself: What kind of person supported it? Did you bring on any organizations as partners?

2. What are the assets I already have in place?

Did you crowdfund your film? Excellent! That means you already have followers, fans, and email addresses. You made a film with a built-in audience. That's an asset. Did you partner with any organizations or institutions that were inter-

ested in your film for its themes and content? Now you have a film with outside support and a way of reaching an audience outside of the film community. That's an asset too. Did you play a festival and continue to stay connected with that festival in terms of social media support? Did you collect emails at every festival screening? Are you going to be doing any theatrical screenings? Do you have an actor that just got picked up for a brand new television show? Is your cousin's best friend's sister best friends with Jeff Goldblum and he said he would tweet to support your film? All good things!

Something that is helpful (and good for morale!) is to write out a list of all of the things you objectively bring to the table with your film, and why you think it would be a strong pick for a distributor. This will be a recurring theme of this document, but keep in mind that no matter how much your distributor loves your film, no one is going to be a bigger advocate for it than you are yourself, and the better you can sell your own film, the better you can get the help and support you need.

3.What do I hope to achieve in terms of releasing my film?

A win at Sundance? Trips to Mediterranean cities? To be Francis Ford Coppola circa 1976? While lovely, these things are usually at the end of a very long, hard road of work on ensuring the successful distribution of not just your first but MANY films.

Do you want increased visibility for yourself as a filmmaker? Do you want to change the world in some way with the message of your film? The opportunity to play in film festivals you like and respect? The ability to pay back your investors? An agent? A studio deal? Do you want to simply be in the position to

make another film after this one?

Your answer may include several of these. It's really important to be very honest when answering this question. Understand the real outcomes you want from the release of your film can and should affect your planning.

4. How much time do I realistically have to put towards the release of my film?

This is a good time to reiterate that no one is going to care about your film as much as you do! Even the most dedicated distributors are dealing with multiple films at any given time, and their marketing resources may be stretched (or non-existent). Which means there is going to be serious legwork on your part if you want to ensure the outcomes for yourself you listed above.

You will need to budget time to:

- Reach out to schools and organizations for screenings or promotion
- Actively update your social media pages each day with relevant postings
- Send out email blasts
- Leverage your existing networks to get butts in seats at screenings or buy the film once available
- Engage with your audience and deepen your relationship with them (this is career-building and looking ahead to your next film)
- Show up at screenings and Q&As (read about how Ira Glass and Mike Birbiglia showed up to dozens of screenings all over the country to promote [*Sleepwalk with Me*](#))

- Rally the cast and crew to promote to their networks
- Create content around your film to further promote it (see what Justin Simien made to promote [Dear White People](#), even with Lionsgate distributing)
- Organize events that drive traffic to your screenings (see what Leah Meyerhoff did to schedule panels at every single theatrical screening of her film [I Believe in Unicorns](#) to supplement a digital launch through Gravitass Ventures)

If you don't have time to do all this yourself, is there someone else on your team that can help? Consider that you might have to hire an intern or a dedicated outreach coordinator if you really want to achieve your goals for the film. Dedication, focus, energy, and time are going to be crucial for a strong release. As the adage goes, if you want something done right, do it yourself (or manage someone to do it properly)!

Here are some other great examples of filmmakers who took the outreach upon themselves even though they had a reputable distributor attached:



1. FAVOR

by Paul Osborne [\(Read more\)](#)

2. THIS IS HAPPENING

by Ryan Jaffe [\(Read more\)](#)

MARKETING

We believe in teaching a filmmaker how to market her own work, so she can use those skills to promote her career and work for the rest of her life. This is why we equip filmmakers with the questions and tools of how they can best support the release of their films.

These questions will help you fill your marketing toolbox:

1. Who is your audience?

As we teach in the [Seed&Spark crowdfunding handbook](#), an audience is not a vague demographic, like “women between 18-24.” Finding your audience (and creating a marketing plan that caters to them) requires that you honor your audience by knowing as much about them as possible, that you treat these people who support you and your work like people.

For example, if you’ve made a film about socialist necromancers, then you need to be tapping into the socialist, necromancer communities.

But you can’t stop there: survey as many people as you can to find out who else might be interested in your film. This process, when done right, always produces surprising results that can expand your audience beyond what you thought possible.

2. What are the entities you can align yourself with?

You don’t have to do it all alone, and there are others, besides us, who might be

interested in supporting you. Consider bringing in organizations to help you!

For your socialist necromancer film, ask yourself: what are the local organizations you could write to to tell about your film? Would they be willing to host a screening? Would they post about you on their social media channels or do an email blast about the film to their community? Can they introduce you to other chapters of their organization to help spread the word? Would they be willing to share their contact lists with you, so that you could do personal outreach? Can you do a Q&A or a seminar around your film that would be of interest to their community? Symbiosis is the key!

3.How can you use social media to spread the word about your film?

Just like you did with your crowdfunding campaign, you'll want to use social media (and the crowd you've gathered) to spread the word high and low about your film. Is your loudest fan base on Twitter? Did you gather an engaged audience on Facebook? Does your Instagram audience love sharing stills and behind the scenes pics from production? Keep those dedicated fan and friends updated via social media as you reach milestones in the distribution of your film.

What types of milestones should you share? We recommend staying away from updates like "We might be up on Hulu, cross your fingers." Instead, consider asking your audience questions: "Where would YOU be more likely to watch me socialist necromancer masterpiece?" Then, after you've made important distribution decisions, share them: "Great news! You'll be able to watch *(Title of Your Awesome Film)* in May!" or "We did it! Get ready to see *(Title of Your Awesome Film)* on Netflix soon!"

One last thing about social media: who are the influencers who you'd most like to share the news about your upcoming distribution? Don't forget to update any press who covered your crowdfunding campaign or production? Make sure to let them know. Are there other filmmakers whose projects you've supported throughout the years? Let me know what you're up to so they can share the news with their fans.

Remember what you did for your crowdfunding campaign? [Refresh your memory](#). These tips and tricks are just as helpful when you're constructing your distribution marketing plan.

5.What does your website look like?

First and foremost, do you have a website? You should have a website. Or a social media page where you are driving most of your traffic, as people need a main source of information where they can find out more and get updates about the film. If you have crowdfunded on Seed&Spark, you have a dynamic page already set up for you that highlights your cast and crew and allows new visitors to follow your project, effectively signing up for your mailing list. Fill your website with useful updates (where and when the film will be released, calls to action, clickable link once the film is available to buy or rent) as well as more creative content that will engage your audience. Have a section for testimonials from audience members, or places where you can share stories about the making of the film, or contests to encourage people to start pre-ordering the film.

Here are a few great examples:

5. Email blasts

What should you be doing when you go to festivals, go to screenings, or go to your aunt's weekly mah jong night? Getting email addresses! Personalized appeals are proven to be the most effective way of engaging an audience. When you go to festivals or events, have a sign up sheet to collect email addresses. Continue to keep people updated by sending targeted emails to share big events, and then once a week leading up to release. Keep in mind that when someone receives an email from you, their experience of that email will determine if they open the next email from you. Sending an email is an extension of your storytelling toolkit, and should be treated as such.

6. Go Big or Go Home

Did you hear about how distributor A24 created a fake Tinder profile for the robot heroine in *EX MACHINA*? Or how, for a re-release of *Jaws*, distributor Drafthouse did a screening with audience members floating in inner tubes over open water? Pulling cool marketing stunts can attract major attention! Creating a public dating profile for one of your characters, putting up a local Craigslist ad for a problem a character faces in a film, seeing if you can stage



a local stunt that is in keeping with the theme of your film—these are all memorable and great ways to get people’s attention, as well as amplify your social media and messaging. Just remember: keep it fun, and keep it true to the tone of your work.

Here are some more great examples:

[Summer Indie Movie Challenge](#)

[Kevin Smith’s Tusk](#)

7. They like me, they really like me!

Get people to review your film! Whether your film is up on a platform like iTunes, where there is a forum for user reviews, or if it’s simply on your website, where there’s a reserved for quotes, get everyone you know to review the film! On established platforms, user generated reviews actually factor into the algorithms that affect how they promote and place films. When it comes to your own website, be creative with it. Do an interview on the street, or a police interrogation video.

8. Contests

Contests are a great way to engage a social media fanbase and create a dialogue with your fans. Did you make a film that has a dysfunctional family in it? Ask your audience to share their best dysfunctional family story to win a prop from the film. Come up with a contest that has a thematic tie to your film and find a way to include and engage your audience. In exchange for a tweet or an email address, send postcards from the film fest circuit or with updates about where you’re screening or broadcasting next.

And remember: prizes don't have to be expensive or even physical. Your fans like you, like your work, and what they want (almost as much as they want your movie) is your time and attention. Example: In exchange for pre-ordering the film, offer to write a limerick incorporating their name and post it to social media to acknowledge them.

Bottom line: marketing is a creative process. Apply the same creativity you brought to making the film as you do to distributing and marketing it.

9. Make a sell sheet.

Help your distributor HELP YOU. A sell sheet is a one-pager that includes relevant information to help sell that we can use as shorthand when pitching your film into the marketplace. Things to include are: festival accolades, positive reviews, partnerships with brands, notable cast with social media followings, stills from the film.

Here's an example for [I Am Talente](#):

(see next page)

Asset Checklist

This is a very brief overview the assets you'll need for distribution. For a thoroughly detailed breakdown, check the [cinema delivery specs](#).

- **Video Files**

These are the full files of your content that we will use for distribution (both in-platform and with our partners), and should be H.264 with AAC audio.

- Full content files for film or series
- Trailer File

- **Closed Captioning File**

- **Artwork**

Your artwork is an especially valuable asset in capturing a potential viewer's attention with digital distribution! Make it clean and *interesting*.

- Poster Art (2:3 ratio)
- Display Art (16:9 ratio)

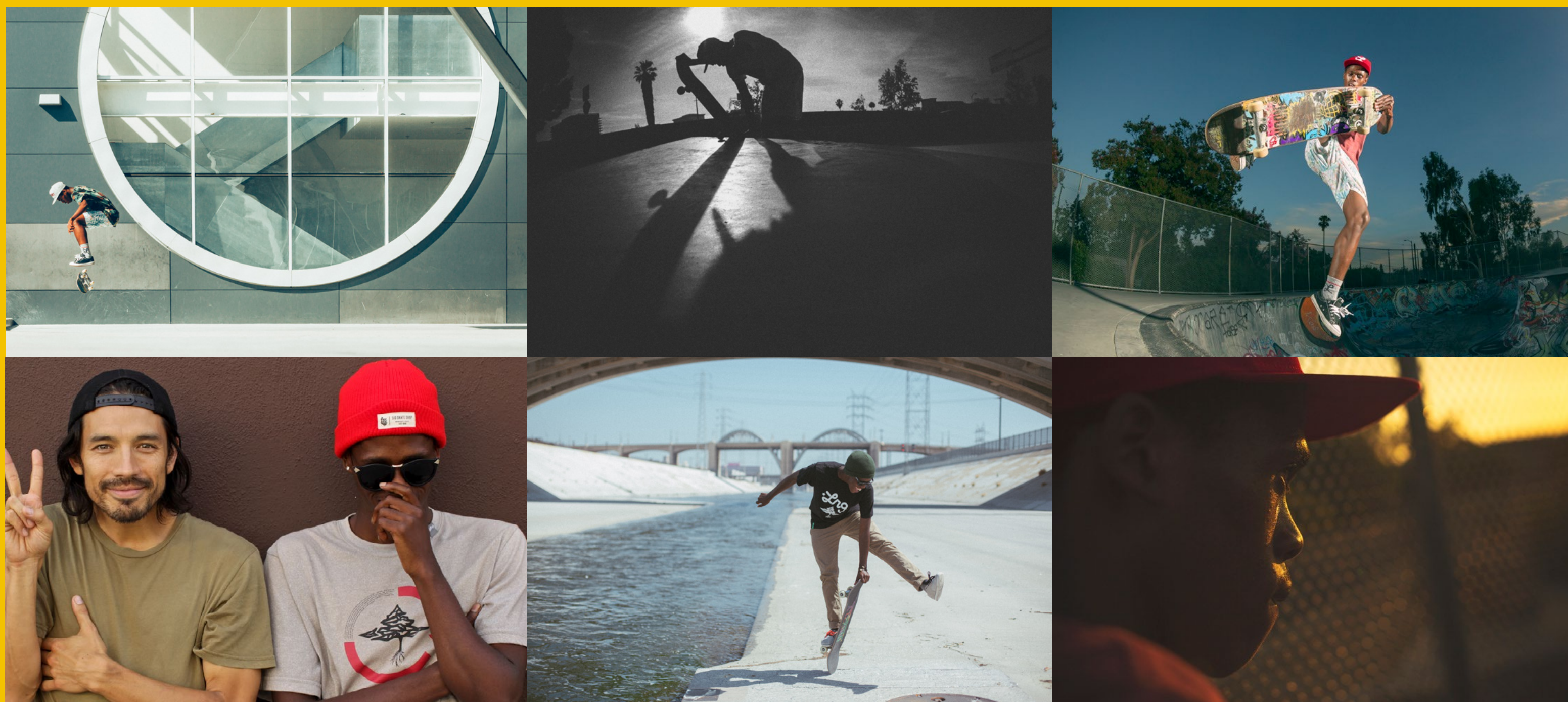
- **Film Stills**

- **Promotional assets**

You'll need good assets to draw in audiences, both for marketing campaigns and in-platform promotion. Make sure you're ready to go with as many interesting visuals, videos, and facts or connections as possible!

- **Sell Sheet**

A sell sheet is a one-sheet with all the topline information about your film: artwork, synopsis, reviews and awards, and any other highlights.



I AM THALENTE

Synopsis: This heartwarming documentary follows local legend, Thalente Biyela, a young skateboarder living on the streets of Durbin, South Africa and discovered by Tony Hawk, as he moves to Los Angeles with the hope of turning pro.

Features world-renowned pro skateboarders **TONY HAWK** (4.13 Million Twitter followers), **KENNY ANDERSON** (10.4 K Twitter followers), and **LANCE MOUNTAIN** (31.3K Twitter followers) with participation from skate website **THE BERRICS** (1.1M Instagram followers) and skate clothing brand, **L-R-G** (462K Instagram followers).

THEATRICAL RELEASE
APRIL 8th, 2016

VOD RELEASE
MAY 13th, 2016

- Through partnerships with Tugg, local skate shops, schools, youth organizations, non-profits, and theaters, the film will have an extensive, audience-driven theatrical in over 25 cities
- The film won the Audience Award at the 2015 LA Film Fest, as well as played the Portland Film Festival and 2016 TIFF New Wave
- Through a partnership with skateboarding destination website, The Berrics, they will be producing unique pieces of original content featuring Thalente and Kenny Anderson skating together in their legendary skate park. They will also be hosting a premiere event and inviting their stable of professional skaters in order to publicize the launch of the film to the skating community.
- The film was a successful crowdfunding campaign, raising over \$60,000 and garnering over 10,000 fans on Instagram

FAQ

What should be my festival strategy?

Like applying to college, apply to festivals can be expensive. And, like colleges, they're ubiquitous. Collecting laurels on a film is a nice feather in your cap, but keep in mind that when your film is up on a VOD platform, they will strip the laurels off anyways.

Don't predicate your film's success on how many laurels it can collect! Instead, use your festival experience to grow your audience. Being at a festival allows you to access a group of people who are excited about your movie. Use it as an opportunity to evangelize and gather advocates and voices for your film.

Don't be afraid to ask for exactly what you need. Ask people to tweet about their experience tagging your film, collect email addresses that you can later use to keep people up to date on your release, or challenge people to Instagram a pic with a fun caption from your screening.

Finally, festivals are fun! You made a movie: what better way to enjoy it than seeing it on a big screen in front of a crowd of people who are intricately interested in your vision and process? You did all of the hard work: now, RELISH IT!

If I distribute my film with Seed&Spark, can I still sell my film off of my website?

Yes, as long as it is NOT available for free, of course, and that you don't start selling it prior to the agreed upon release date for your other external platforms.

What will you guys do to help supplement my marketing?

While we would love to create individual marketing plans for every one of our films, we feel it is a far better use of our time to help educate filmmakers on marketing so that they can continue to use this knowledge throughout their career. When you have the tools, you are in charge of the trajectory of your own film, and you are in control of your own audience, which is essential so that you can connect with them as you embark on future projects.

What we do on the marketing front is what's known as merchandising, which means negotiating for placement and position within the VOD channels (a "New and Noteworthy" position on iTunes, or a special genre-specific folder on cable for instance). We tell them all of the wonderful things you do and the audience you have built and convince the suits! We have provided this informational handbook for your reference, and we are always here for questions!