

Distribution

Once your film is completed, you will probably want to show it to as many people as possible. This is the process of distribution. While it is unlikely that your film will land a big distribution deal and be shown in movie theatres across the world, there are lots of ways you can get it seen. Remember that if you are showing your film publicly, you need to make sure that you have permission for all the music and pre-existing footage you may have included, and that you have secured release forms from the people appearing in your film.

Presenting your Film in a Professional Manner

However you go about getting your film screened, remember that this is effectively your calling card. Treat your work with pride and present it as professionally as you can. You never know who you might impress.

If you want an external organization to consider screening your film, whether this is a movie theatre, a film festival, a broadcaster or a local community group, there are a number of things that you can do that will ensure that these organizations take your film more seriously.

Format: If you can, transfer your film to DVD to have someone evaluate it. It's good quality and relatively inexpensive to make a DVD copy, it's cheap and easy to send, and most people now have access to DVD players. You can always discuss alternative screening formats afterwards.

Labelling: If at all possible, print a label on your DVD. It looks so much better than scribbling with a Sharpie. Include the title, running time and your contact details.

Case: Put your DVD in a clear plastic case. It looks much better than a paper slip and is much more durable if you are mailing it. A clear case means that people can see your label and it is less likely to get lost in a pile.

Other materials: If you can, put together a "press kit" for your film. It not only looks impressive, it also lets people know that there are promotional materials available if they decide to screen your film. These materials can be submitted as hard copies, on a CD-ROM, or can even be part of a website you might create for your film. Write a synopsis of your film, and include a cast and credit list. Let people know if this film has won awards, screened at other festivals, on TV, in theatres or if it has been shown extensively in your community. Provide similar details of previous films you have made. Provide digital stills, or at least indicate that stills are available, especially if you can host these on a website.

Organizing Your Own Screenings

You can organize screenings at your school, in community centres and youth centres. An increasing number of venues may have digital projection facilities that can hook up with DVD players so that you can show your film on something bigger than a television. You can also rent some movie theatres (like Pacific Cinémathèque) for private events and get to see your film on a full-size movie screen. If a few of you rent a venue together, it might be cheaper than you'd think.

Remember that if you are organizing a screening by yourself, that you also have to publicize the event. An ad in a local paper, posters in strategic places, or even emailing all your friends can be an effective way of ensuring a good turnout.

Community Screening Events

A number of organizations offer screenings of youth-produced films on a fairly regular basis. In Vancouver, these organizations include Pacific Cinémathèque's Education Department (www.cinematheque.bc.ca/education); Cineworks Independent Filmmakers Society (Membership required - www.cineworks.ca); video in (www.videoinstudios.com) and Youth Week, an annual event throughout BC (www.bcyouthweek.com).

Smaller, independent cinemas may also consider screening a short film before a feature. The larger chains are often much more restricted in what they can show. You can contact smaller theatres in your area to inquire whether they do consider showing shorts before sending your film in.

Film Festivals

Film festivals offer a great opportunity to get your film seen by a large number of people, and maybe even get noticed by an industry insider. Not every film festival will accept youth productions, but there are a number that are dedicated to youth-produced film, have a dedicated youth-film section, or are just open to submissions from young filmmakers.

There are thousands of film festivals every year, and finding one that might consider your film is not always easy. Most festivals have a website that can give you information and submission details, and there are a number of good ways of finding out about upcoming deadlines. You could subscribe to online newsletters like CuedUp (www.cinematheque.bc.ca/cuedup) from Pacific Cinémathèque that will announce upcoming submission deadlines for youth-friendly festivals, or check out some of the festival directories such as the ones at www.moviemaker.com or www.thedirectorinthe classroom.com.

Some of the more established festivals that are targeted at, or receptive to youth productions in Canada include the BC Student Film Festival (www.bcstudentfilm.com); FreezeFrame (www.freezeframeonline.org); Zoom Student Film Festival (www.zoomfest.com); Images festival (www.imagesfestival.com); and Jump Cuts at the Victoria Independent Film and Video Festival (www.vifvf.com/jumpcuts). It is also worth remembering that there are numerous "themed" festivals that your film might fit into. Some of these themes might be fairly narrow and obscure, other festivals like Out On Screen (www.outonscreen.com) incorporate a huge range of issues under their overall umbrella.

A Word of Warning about For-Profit Festivals:

There are numerous stories of younger filmmakers spending a lot of money to participate in "festivals" that are essentially set up to hook aspiring filmmakers into purchasing services. Almost all entries are "accepted" and screened, so anyone in the industry knows that participation in one of these festivals says nothing about the quality of your work.

While most festivals are legitimate, it's worth doing your homework for festivals you've never heard of. A quick Google search should tell you if there are complaints about it. Here are some additional points to check into if you're considering entering an unfamiliar festival:

- Check the website. If the content is vague and there is little information about what organization is sponsoring the event, it may be a company rather than a not-for-profit film organization.
- How much is the entry fee? Most youth-oriented festivals don't ask for more than \$25 or \$30.
- Does the sponsoring organization offer other services for a fee, such as offering to take your film to the industry trade shows in Cannes or New York, or to put together a "professional" press kit? This is an almost sure sign that you are dealing with a company putting on "festivals" to find customers.
- Do you have to pay the shipping fees to get your film back from the festival? This should not be the case.

For the most part these festivals are not breaking any laws, but they certainly might not be serving your best interests. Basically, if you have to spend a reasonable amount of money to submit your film, do your homework and find out as much as you can about the festival and its reputation first.

TV and Broadcast Screenings

A relatively small number of young filmmakers get to have their films screened on TV. Some broadcasters do have initiatives and competitions for young filmmakers though. These initiatives often call for film proposals to be sent in. The broadcasters will then choose their favourites and fund these all the way from script development through to their screening. It is relatively uncommon though for the larger broadcasters to ask for completed films to be submitted for screening, especially from young unknown filmmakers.

But there are opportunities to get your completed film shown on TV. Local cable stations are interested in films made in their area, and have shown youth-produced work in the past. Independent Community Television (ICTV) on Shaw Cable (www.vcn.bc.ca/ictv/welcome.htm) is a good place to start. Certain magazine format programs may also feature youth-produced work, including CBC's Zed (www.zed.cbc.ca/go). Zed is both a TV and web-based program that is interested in a wide range of film and video art.