




Finding festivals & fans, Creating buzz & benefits

A guide to marketing short films



screenaustralia.gov.au



Making a quality short film can be an effective way of establishing a career in feature films, but take a wrong step in the marketing phase and the potential could be lost. This guide describes various options for exploiting short films and emphasises that the most effective strategy flows from an honest appraisal of the quality and nature of the film itself and a firm focus on the filmmaker's objectives. It provides practical information and outlines how to negotiate the festival, sales and self-distribution landscape. It is applicable whether the short film is live action, animation, documentary or something else entirely. There is considerable value in reading this guide before cameras roll.

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Focus on purpose and possibilities

The short film is finally finished. What to do with it now? Pause, step back and think because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to marketing short films. Firstly decide what you want to achieve and then honestly assess the quality and nature of the film itself. Base all actions on this information.

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There are always exceptions to prove the rule but it would not be out of line to say two words – “dream on!” – to filmmakers who think they will become rich from the earnings from one short film. Just saying.

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Do it yourself online

The internet offers a whole new world of distribution opportunities and options for directly linking films and customers. However, just making the content available is not the same as creating the desire to watch it.



Focus on purpose and possibilities

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Stories abound of compelling short films becoming overnight sensations online or winning major prizes and catapulting those who made them directly into the heart of Hollywood. But short films that are just as impressive miss out on getting the attention they deserve and disappear without trace.

Success is unpredictable because thousands of short films are made worldwide each year and there is very little commercial impetus driving them. The experience can be beautiful for some filmmakers and brutal for others because there are so many uncontrollable factors: serendipity, for example, and the level and nature of the competition at a particular time.

Think clearly, act strategically to maximize the potential.

There is no point beating around the bush: the film itself is one of the biggest determinants of success and it may be better to move on to the next film project rather than spending time and money marketing a film that didn't work out as well as hoped. (And it is definitely better to move on immediately if the film is deeply flawed because spruiking it could be more damaging than beneficial.)

Consider and honour the original intent behind the work. A politically motivated short could be very popular within a relevant specialist festival but not measure up to the high level of competition at a major festival. A film made to test an idea, prove the worth of the production team or showcase the strength and suitability of an actor for a planned feature may have perfectly fulfilled that purpose but that doesn't mean it is capable of winning major prizes.

Honestly assess the quality and nature of the finished film.

Focusing on what you want to achieve long term is also critical when determining a marketing strategy.

Frankly, a filmmaker with an outstanding short and the penultimate goal of financing a dramatic feature (ie not a genre picture) should treat the Sundance, Berlin, Cannes and Venice film festivals as priorities.

The competition is cut throat but winning a major short film prize at any of these four festivals can have a powerful effect on a filmmaker's career on many levels – and on the likelihood of securing commercial deals for the film. Targeting the most prestigious festivals first is the traditional marketing pathway and it still has a lot of potential benefits.

Keep the expectations and ambitions of the filmmaking team in mind.

Filmmakers interested in making genre films may be better off submitting to the Sitges Film Festival, SXSW or Fantastic Fest than to the most prestigious festivals. Filmmakers who know they will only make shorts as a hobby might just want their shorts seen by as many people as possible – or on a big screen.

If a filmmaker is determined to crowd fund a well developed low-budget feature, perhaps time and energy is better spent doing that rather than marketing a short. Shorts can very effectively help find niche audiences by utilising the power of the internet and social media.

If a filmmaker wants to direct television or get employment as a commissioner, perhaps it is a better option to use the short as part of a well thought-through plan to approach individual executives at production companies or government agencies.



SNIPPET

The stuff dreams are made of

Panic Attack!, a science-fiction film that runs less than five minutes, led to director Fede Alvarez from Uruguay signing a lucrative Hollywood feature deal. He'd not previously made a feature and has since made *Evil Dead*. Although *Panic Attack!* didn't win any of the major prizes after it premiered at the Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre film festival, it was honoured by the festival for its post-production. A few days later it was available for the world to see on YouTube. "I uploaded it on a Thursday and on Monday my inbox was totally full of emails from Hollywood studios," Alvarez told the BBC. Musician Kanye West's blog included a link to the film, one of the reasons it got the level of attention it did.

Read more here mashable.com/2009/12/19/youtube-movie-robots/

Those who believe that online distribution will eventually change the nature of everything, including film marketing and financing, may want to use their film to start building a self-distribution portal or a database of fans.

Whatever the aim is, act accordingly, because the fate of a film and the filmmakers behind it are entwined.

These points can help the team consider what they want to achieve from their marketing efforts.

- The most influential distributors, sales agents, financiers, talent spotters and other film industry players can be found at the most prestigious festivals, and winning a major short film award – even just being in competition – increases the opportunities for a filmmaker to get attention.
- Creating an online buzz around a tasty morsel of film is a way of building up a fan base that can be transformed into a permanent resource for film distribution or raising financing.
- It has never been easier to access special interest audiences around the world.
- Short films are saleable but it is highly unlikely that an individual film will make anyone rich.
- Critical and commercial acclaim rewards not just the key cast and the filmmaking triumvirate of writer/director/producer but all collaborators, backers and helpers for their hard work.
- The marketing and networking skills developed by shopping around a short film are well worth learning.



SNIPPET

Be afraid, be very afraid

The **2013 Sundance Film Festival** received 8,102 short film submissions and programmed 65.
Source: indiewire.com

The **2013 Cannes Film Festival** received 3,200 submissions and chose nine for official competition.
Source: shericandler.com

The **2012 Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival** received 7,125 applications and chose 77 international, 59 French and 35 experimental films for its competition programs.
Source: screenhub.com.au

Filmmakers, especially those at the beginning of their careers, have to plot a path that balances working on their own projects, earning money and developing skills, a good reputation and contacts. Any marketing plan needs to be seen in this light.



SNIPPET

Oh yes, shorts are important too

"Across the world film schools attempt to de-emphasise the importance of short films, awarding in the thousand, film degrees, bachelor degrees, masters, even doctorates in place of the only thing anyone in the industry is interested to see: a knock out short. You learn how to be a filmmaker by making films."

Jane Campion, filmmaker and president of the short film jury at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.



Research, research, research

With outcomes in mind, get stuck into the research. Develop an understanding of the festival, self-distribution and sales landscape. Make notes as you go and be open to all ideas whether wise or wacky.

Successfully marketing a short needs the same planning, precision and creativity that producing the film required.

The intention behind this guide is to help filmmakers plot their own strategy and act on it. Read through the guide and use the links to seek out information and prompt ideas.

It will take two or three days hunched over a computer to get a feel for the possibilities. Examine the festival landscape, get to know the key commercial short film players and assess the self-distribution options. Expect every action to have consequences.

Keep notes as the research progresses so that information doesn't get lost. Here are some suggestions on how to order the notes:

- Estimates of **key expenses** for inclusion in a budget. These will probably include but not be limited to the design and printing of flyers and DVD covers, duplication and dubbing, freight and postage, entry fees and, in the event of getting into an international competition, travel.
- **Key dates** for priority festivals including submission deadlines, the timing of announcements regarding finalists and the actual festival dates.
- The **required formats** for preview and screening copies for priority festivals.
- Links to **festivals, companies and information** that are not in this document and may be required later.

- **Marketing ideas** as they arise, including the wacky ones because they might be just what's needed to make a film catch the eye of someone influential.
- **Facts or figures** that could be used to give the film or the filmmakers an advantage. Perhaps a key sales agent already handles a short that shares the same cinematographer or writer, or a festival programmer has the same surname as the director. Perhaps the producer's father was born in a city with a vibrant short film festival. Use any trick necessary to stand out from the crowd.

Don't hesitate to contact filmmaking colleagues who have been to festivals that look enticing, sold their work to sales agents that seem to suit or implemented a self-distribution strategy.

Continually assess your film's capacity to achieve critical and commercial success by watching award-winning films and examining short film catalogues.

Bear costs in mind from the outset so that a marketing strategy and a budget for the implementation of that strategy can be locked down simultaneously. Choices will have to be made about the method of finding advocates unless there is unlimited money.

It is thrilling to see a film on a big screen but outside of the festival context it is unusual for short films to get a theatrical outing. If it can be arranged with some clever footwork, however, the novelty value could make it worth its weight in marketing gold.



SNAPSHOT

Shorts + festivals = a powerful combo

Shorts and festivals are important for career development on many levels. Consider the festival trajectory of these three directors:

- **Justin Kurzel:** *Blue Tongue*, Cannes, 2005; *Snowtown*, Cannes, 2011
- **Warwick Thornton:** *Green Bush*, Sundance, 2005; *Samson & Delilah*, Adelaide and Cannes, 2009
- **David Michôd:** *Crossbow*, Sundance, 2008; *Netherland Dwarf*, Berlin, 2009; *Animal Kingdom*, Sundance, 2010.

Keep alert to upcoming features that might be a perfect match. It is a long shot but showing a short before a feature might work, providing the short is modest in length.

If you or the film have a particular connection to a suburb or a region, it might be possible to have a community-based screening in conjunction with a local independently owned cinema. Or perhaps a local library, art gallery, museum or educational institution with an auditorium might be persuaded to get involved.

Surviving as a filmmaker depends on maintaining solid relationships. Don't forget to keep the cast and crew informed of what's going on with the film they worked on.



SUGGESTION

Think imaginatively

If a key creative or cast member was born abroad, it may be of benefit to target festivals in their birth country. These festivals all present short film awards:

- **Animafest Zagreb World Festival of Animated Film** (Croatia) www.animafest.hr/en/
- **Message to Man** (St Petersburg, Russia) message2man.com/eng/
- **Sao Paulo International Short Film Festival** (Brazil) www.kinoforum.org.br/curtas/2013/en/
- **Sarajevo Film Festival** (Bosnia-Herzegovina) www.sff.ba/en
- **Shanghai International Film Festival** (China) www.siff.com/InformationEn/Index.aspx



Plot and prepare

Lock down a marketing strategy and an affordable budget simultaneously. Execution should begin once clearances are checked, marketing materials are finalised and other preparations made.

Use this document and your research, common sense and creativity to simultaneously write a marketing strategy and a budget. Stamina will be required to implement a comprehensive campaign and even the most modest plan will require time and money.

Make an agreement between the principal filmmaking parties before any action is taken. It should stipulate how costs will be met and who will implement the strategy, travel to festivals and keep any revenues or cash prizes in the unlikely event that these monies exceed costs.

Once the plan and the budget are finalised there are just two matters to attend to before the implementation phase begins.

Do not breach copyright as the consequences can be serious.

It is very important that all rights and clearances are in order before entering films in festivals or submitting them to potential buyers. Anything in a film that is not created by the filmmakers must be cleared. This includes books and printed matter, signage or brand names, a piece of music or a sculpture. Don't leave anything to chance and expect to have to sign warranties.

The ideal is that every clearance applies to every platform, everywhere in the world, forever. Otherwise it might be necessary to return to rights holders again and again to extend the permissions and that will be very tiresome.

Make the press kit compact, clear and tantalising.

Complete all components of the press kit and other supporting materials and file them in a well ordered way. All submissions and enquiries will require at least some of this information to be attached. Plus opportunities will arise quickly and are best acted on immediately.

All the marketing materials must look and read professionally, reflect the film accurately and have a consistent message. No one has the time or desire to wade through reams of information: leave readers wanting more.

Confirm which marketing hooks will be emphasised. (It is a concern if no thought has been put into marketing before now.) Perhaps the content is unique or controversial. If there are no big names in the cast perhaps it is arguable that one of the leads will be the next big thing.

Programmers and buyers won't watch a short unless the supporting materials are enticing.

There are many press kit templates to follow but here are the minimum inclusions:

- A one-page summary that includes title, one-line synopsis (which should hint at genre and not contain spoilers), lead cast, writer/director/producer, length, production company, nationality, format and screening ratio, copyright owners and date, website address and contact details.
- One-line, one-paragraph and half-page (maximum 200 words) synopses.
- A director's statement (maximum 200 words).
- Making-of information (maximum 500 words and including interesting anecdotes and notes on the origin of the project and how it was financed).
- Brief biographies of key cast and crew (maximum 200 words each but preferably less).
- At least three high-resolution, high-quality colour stills from the film.
- A high-resolution high-quality photograph of the director.

Keep additional information in a place where it is easily accessible. If a short film is suitable for a festival that focuses only on human rights, for example, you may need to provide more background highlighting its relevance to this subject.

Providing fabulous stills is critical.

Photographs will influence what audiences choose to see at festivals or online. A very compelling photograph can deliver a film enormous attention because it will be reproduced often and prominently in the media, in festival programs and on websites. Caption all photographs carefully and in an enticing fashion.

Be creative but stay true to the film. Be edgy or provocative only if it suits. Building interest is the aim but the film has to deliver on the nature of the expectation. Consider whether a piece of content has the potential to go viral if treated in a certain way. If the lead characters drink a lot of beer, produce some stubby holders.

Assess the need for an EPK, a trailer or a website.

An **EPK** (electronic press kit) and trailer will help maximise the potential of a film but these items come at a cost that might not be warranted – particularly in the case of an EPK if no interviews were recorded with cast and crew during production.

Having an **online presence** will enhance any campaign and has the advantage of being permanent and easily accessible. It can allow interested parties to download press materials, see the film with a password-protected link and be impressed by the latest positive reviews and accolades – if someone is updating the site. Consider whether to create a stand-alone website, a Facebook page or something included under the production company's or filmmakers' URL.



SNAPSHOT

Imagine winning an Oscar® or BAFTA

A filmmaker with his or her heart set on winning an Academy Award® with a short film needs to carefully study the [rules available on the Academy website](#).

These rules indicate, for example, that films are only eligible if they have a commercial screening in Los Angeles or if they win a qualifying award at one of a number of [competitive film festivals](#) listed on the site.

Here's the equivalent list of qualifying festivals for the [British Academy of Film and Television Arts \(BAFTA\) Awards](#).

The Flickerfest International Short Film Festival, the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Sydney Film Festival are the three Australian festivals included in both lists.

Get supporting materials ready in advance.

To service a sale it may be necessary to supply – along with the press kit inclusions and a master – some or all of the following:

- a transcript of the dialogue in English
- music and effects on separate tracks
- music cue sheets
- chain of title – documents establishing your right to make the film
- location permissions
- key artwork for marketing materials such as flyers, posters and postcards
- cast and crew list
- trailer
- EPK.

Getting all these materials ready will save time and money because it will be possible to meet – immediately and without fuss – all technical and other requirements of a festival, buyer or online partner.

The preview format and the projection format are usually different. In some cases there will be a need for subtitles. PAL and NTSC copies may be required.



SUGGESTION

Check out Screen Australia's website

Don't underestimate how much invaluable information is on the Screen Australia website. For example:

Do things by the book when it comes to clearances: There's a [Clearances list template](#) in the [Filmmaking section](#), which shows the range of visual and aural items that might be in a film and need to be cleared.

Learn about publicists, photographers and costs: A series of online guides in the [Marketing section](#) – written with features in mind but applicable to short films too – are about working with unit publicists and photographers and producing electronic press kits. There's also a rather sobering list of likely marketing costs.

Finalise the film in a number of files and formats at the time of mastering.

Mastering trends change. Seek advice if unsure. Here are some examples of common formats (as of early 2014):

- Apple ProRes
- DigiBeta
- Blu-Ray
- DVD
- HDCAM/HDCAM SR.

Check all copies carefully before sending them anywhere. The film will be one of a big pile of films, and selectors and programmers may be quick to disregard it if there are any technical problems whatsoever.

If you intend to upload a film to one online platform and send it and the supporting materials on to many festivals using that platform, look at all the requirements well in advance.

Make it clear on all materials, including copies of the actual film, what ratio it should be screened in, for example, 4:3 or 16:9 anamorphic. The easier it is for the projectionist, the less likely it is that there will be problems with the screening.

Finally, formally schedule the implementation of the marketing strategy to get it done quickly and efficiently. Films rapidly lose their freshness. Keep detailed records of all actions taken and, for taxation and other purposes, keep receipts and other proof of expenses.



SNIPPET

Understand what the Short Film Corner is

Note that participating in the Short Film Corner at the Cannes Film Festival has nothing to do with being in official selection. It is a viewing platform and market for short films. Anyone can participate and it can be useful but it is not considered to be an indicator of talent.

For more info www.shericandler.com/2013/05/08/working-the-cannes-short-film-corner/



Festivals: Be very strategic

Festivals play a key role in creating buzz. They're a place for finding audiences and future partners, signing deals and perhaps even winning accolades. That's the good news. The sobering news is that there are thousands to choose from and competition is high to get into the best.

Filmmakers intent on building a career in feature films need to be very strategic. If they have a short that could measure up to the best in the world they are advised to target the festivals that are the most prestigious and have a short film competition.

The top five A-list festivals that meet these criteria and will give a film and its filmmakers the biggest boost are:

- **Berlinale** (Germany) www.berlinale.de/en/HomePage.html
- **Cannes Film Festival** (France) www.festival-cannes.fr/en.html
- **Sundance Film Festival** (US) www.sundance.org/festival/
- **Toronto International Film Festival** (Canada) www.tiff.net/
- **Venice International Film Festival** (Italy) www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/

Films only get one world premiere and being in competition at one of these festivals can deliver huge benefits – even without winning awards – because they are where the most talent spotting occurs. Be wary about saying yes to any other overseas festivals before all opportunities to get a spot in one of these five have been exhausted.

In years to come, having a short in one of these competitions could also clear the way for a follow-up feature debut to be shown within the same festival because a relationship has already been established.

Don't despair if this plan doesn't come to fruition however, because second and third tier festivals and specialist events can also be platforms for winning accolades and learning about the business. They can also be less overwhelming. Note too that any festival can be inspiring on a creative level if it

has been programmed with care and intelligence and is attended by like-minded filmmakers.

It is easy to feel bamboozled by the number of festivals.

By systematically working through festival websites, some decisions will make themselves: the submission deadline might have just passed and waiting another year might not be acceptable, for example, or the film may not meet certain eligibility criteria.

The rules around duration vary greatly. The Academy Awards® and the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival accept short films up to 40 minutes in length whereas Sundance accepts them up to 50 minutes. The Cannes Film Festival, the most prestigious on earth, will only accept shorts up to 15 minutes in length.

Keep an eye on the industry alerts issued by Screen Australia to see if there are any programmers about to visit Australia. Being part of the Screen Australia-facilitated screenings during these visits helps achieve cut through.

Here are some matters to bear in mind while researching festivals:

- Target film festivals that have competitions, are recognised by the Academy Awards® or, especially in the case of the specialist short film festivals, have a market attached.
- Every single festival has its own characteristics and reputation and chooses films and attracts guests accordingly.
- A film can only have one world premiere and never-seen-before status can be used as a bargaining chip.



SUGGESTION

More from Screen Australia's website

Take heed of this list: If in any doubt about which international film festivals Screen Australia regards as being A-list for short films, then look here www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding/talent_escalator/acclaim.aspx.

Part of the eligibility criteria for Screen Australia's Directors Acclaim Fund is a list of festivals. Drama directors whose short has been selected for one of these festivals but who have not yet made a feature can apply for up to \$15,000 in cash for professional development through this fund.

Get the overview: These festivals have screened Australian films and hosted Australian filmmakers www.screenaustralia.gov.au/festivals.

- Not being able to attend a festival to support a film is a wasted opportunity.
- Just being shown in a festival could have negligible benefits if nobody has heard of the event or it doesn't attract industry players.
- If pressed for time and money consider using the key Australian festivals as a testing ground. Flickerfest and the St Kilda Film Festival are the two key short film events.

It will quickly become apparent that submission requirements vary greatly. Some festivals only want films of a certain genre and are strict about the age of a film. Some are lenient about films being shown in their own country first, others are not.

Consider the financial implications. Festivals know audiences love to interact with filmmakers and some pay for accommodation and flights for people attached to films in competition. Others don't. Some festivals don't charge entry fees and some do, or do after a certain date. Check who pays for freight, whether the film needs to be subtitled, and if there is a requirement to deliver in an unusual format.

Short film festivals have advantages and disadvantages.

According to research by Screen Australia, having a short film selected in an international A-list feature film festival tends to be a better indicator of a director going on to make a feature than if the short was selected only for a dedicated short film festival. Possibly this is because of the exposure to feature film executives and the broader feature film marketplace.

Over the past six years (2008–2013) nine shorts have been selected at Cannes, with 56% of their directors going on to gain a feature credit, and 15 shorts (made by 12 directors) have screened at Sundance, with 50% of directors going on to gain a feature credit. By comparison, 34 shorts made by 37 directors have screened at Clermont-Ferrand, with 14% of directors going on to gain a feature credit. Note that the term 'feature credit' includes feature documentaries.

That said, plenty of filmmakers have gained substantial benefits from short film festivals, particularly those with markets such as Aspen and Clermont-Ferrand. Palm Springs International Shortfest claims on its website to be the largest short film festival in North America and the only short film market in that part of the world.

Some filmmakers also appreciate being in an environment where short films are honoured and celebrated as an art form.

Here is a list of some of well known short film festivals:

- **Aspen Shortsfest** (US) www.aspenfilm.org/index.php/events/aspen-shortsfest
- **Hamburg International Short Film Festival** (Germany) festival.shortfilm.com
- **Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival** (France) www.clermont-filmfest.com
- **Palm Springs International ShortFest** (US) www.psfilmfest.org/festival
- **Oberhausen International Short Film Festival** (Germany) www.kurzfilmtage.de/
- **Short Shorts Film Festival** (Japan) <http://www.shortshorts.org>
- **Tampere International Short Film Festival** (Finland) www.tamperefilmfestival.fi
- **Uppsala International Short Film Festival** (Sweden) www.shortfilmfestival.com

Specialist festivals may be the ideal.

Smart filmmakers match their films and their personal aims to each festival's idiosyncrasies.

Think carefully about content, genre – and even personal characteristics too. There are many festivals specifically for films with strong gay, Indigenous or disabled themes for example. And if the filmmaker identifies as one of these, that angle too can be exploited. Calculating as it may seem, it could begin an invaluable life-long relationship.

There are festivals just for documentaries, animated films, films about the environment, films catering to young audiences and films made by women.



SNAPSHOT

Clermont-Ferrand is top of the short film crop

Established in 1979 in the Auvergne region of France, the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival is held early each year and is generally regarded as the most important short film festival on the planet. Films of 40 minutes or less are eligible for the international competition even if they have screened in France or other parts of Europe already, and there is no fee to enter. Any film submitted, whether selected or not, is included in the market catalogue. Filmmakers can choose to get additional visibility by registering their films in the market, which attracts as many as 3,300 industry professionals. Once in the video/online library, films can be viewed for the following nine months by talent scouts, potential buyers, producers and so on.

Read more here www.clermont-filmfest.com/index.php?nlang=2.

Here is a tiny taste of themed and specialist film festivals – some well known and some hardly known – all of which have an international short film competition:

- **Anecy International Animated Film Festival** (France) is generally regarded as the most important festival for animated films and it includes a market www.anecy.org
- **Cineglobe** (Geneva, Switzerland) is focused on short films inspired by science cineglobe.ch/
- **CinéRail Festival** (Paris, France) is for films with thematic links to trains www.cineraail-fest.com
- **Fantastic Fest** (Austin, Texas) bills itself as the largest genre film festival in the US and specializes in horror, fantasy, sci-fi and action films fantasticfest.com/
- **International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam** (Netherlands) is one of the most important documentary festivals and has a significant industry program www.idfa.nl/industry.aspx
- **Taiwan International Children's Film Festival** (Taipei) claims to be the biggest festival in the Asian region dedicated to all kinds of films suitable for children under 12 years of age www.ticff.org.tw
- **Tricky Women** (Vienna, Austria) claims to be the only festival dedicated exclusively to short animated films made by women www.trickywomen.at.



SUGGESTION

Festivals and lists of festivals abound

There are countless lists of festivals online. Start with these:

- en.unifrance.org/catalogue/calendrier-des-manifestations-CM-annee-prochaine.pdf – from UniFrance, which promotes French films worldwide
- worldwideshortfilmfest.com/resource-centre/getting-it-seen/ – from the Canadian Film Centre, which accelerates the development of and promotes local creative talent
- www.raindance.org/worlds-top-short-film-festivals/ – from the UK's Raindance Film Festival
- www.making-short-films.com/festivals/ – from Clifford Thurlow, author of the book *Making Short Films*.

Films and accompanying materials can be uploaded once and then submitted to many festivals from a range of online platforms. These services carefully track festivals so their websites are an ideal place to search for information and entry deadlines. Some of these platforms will also upload DVDs mailed to them, facilitate the distribution and sale of films, and offer translation and subtitling services.

Here are examples of key platforms used by festivals:

- **Festhome** festhome.com/
- **Reelport** www.reelport.com/
- **Shortfilmdepot** www.shortfilmdepot.com/
- **Withoutabox** www.withoutabox.com/

The Oberhausen International Short Film Festival established Reelport, which claims to be the biggest platform in Europe. Shortfilmdepot has links to the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival and a long history of promoting short film culture. Withoutabox claims it has been receiving and managing submissions electronically longer than any other platforms and services 900 festivals. IMDb.com acquired Withoutabox in 2008, which explains why filmmakers can be invited to create a page on IMDb during the process of submitting a film.

Keep control of the film by being wary about uploading a high-quality digital version to platforms such as these. If there is no choice but to do so, make sure there is something on screen that makes it clear the copy is for preview purposes only.

Once the ball starts rolling

Congratulations! The film has been accepted into a major competition and is being noticed by buyers. Keep a level head.

There are few good reasons not to leap at a competitive spot in an A-list festival; the trick is to capitalise on the opportunity.

Investigate travel assistance through funding agencies where eligible and see what the festival will cover in terms of flights and other transport, accommodation and food. Don't be naïve about the cost of attending a festival such as Cannes as it could be as much as \$10,000.

Talk in advance to others who are going from Australia, including agency representatives. Contact filmmakers who have had films in competition at that festival and pick their brains. Use the opportunity to get local media coverage.

Let the festival know well in advance who will be attending and offer to introduce the film and participate in general discussions and Q&As. Ask organisers to send as much information as possible in advance, including delegate lists, the location of available meeting and networking spaces and the system for contacting industry attendees.



SNIPPET

Preparing for a festival

There is no better way to prepare for a trip to the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival than taking the advice here www.clermont-filmfest.com/index.php?m=274. Use it as a template for other festivals too.

And check out the dedicated websites produced each year by Screen Australia to support the Australian presence at the [Cannes](#), [Berlin](#), [Toronto](#) festivals.

Set up as many meetings in advance with talent scouts, buyers, programmers and others who can help find audiences for the film and deliver career opportunities. It is important to hit the ground running.

Go armed with marketing materials, including postcards giving screening times and dates and business cards. Ensure copies of the film are properly labelled with contact information and other information.

Be clear about the aim of each meeting and find out as much as possible in advance about the people and companies. Some will be very interested in projects in development so have single-page summaries on hand and verbal pitches ready. Be very professional at all times, keep accurate records of conversations and follow up via email within a week.

In the cinema on the day, approach festival staff and take any opportunities going to appear in public. Participate as much as possible in the life of the festival – providing it doesn't distract from the serious business.

If the festival is not A-list, weigh up the possible flow-on effects of agreeing to be in competition, especially if high-profile festivals are sitting on the film and are soon to reveal their line-ups. Do not let the world premiere pass without having an impact.

Check back that the submission form doesn't stipulate that some rights must be consigned to the festival as a condition of being in competition.



SNAPSHOT

Learning from experience

"Have your next project ready to pitch – use the hype of being selected as a way to try and generate interest."

"Do your research ... but take your time deciding who to go with. We felt a lot of pressure to have a sales agent in advance of Clermont-Ferrand and were grateful we did not sign in advance as the offers generated at the festival were much better than those we received prior!"

"There is a lot of opportunity, so make sure you put yourself in the best position to be able to take advantage of it. Scour the internet for emails and contact people before you get there."

More tips from festival attendees at www.screenaustralia.gov.au/festivals.

Read the fine print in all agreements and contracts.

Some will advise appointing a sales agent before getting on the plane; others say wait until after the festival screenings. Do as much research as possible into suitable companies and their catalogues. Enquire about the business performance of films that are similar in tone and length. Carefully study contracts before signing them. The key question is what rights in what territories will the sales agent have and for how long. Consider arguing to keep certain rights or for some rights to be non-exclusive in order to personally exploit them. Consider where the film is in its festival life and act accordingly. Ask the sales agent to pay an advance on sales – even though it is unlikely – and ask how regularly sales statements are provided and revenue share passed on. Make sure costs are capped.

In some jurisdictions, withholding tax is a real issue for international sales deals and filmmakers who don't have a registered company and cannot supply a certificate of residency from the Australian Tax Office could miss out on revenues. The sales agent should be able to advise on this.

Continue to keep good records of actions taken, correspondence received, prizes and accolades won, attendance figures at major screenings and anything else that will impress. Regularly search online for mentions. Diligence will pay off in years to come. Keep an open mind about giving the film a further push if its content suddenly becomes more relevant because of current affairs. Above all, don't be disheartened by rejection; it is part and parcel of the film industry.



Choose a sales agent with care

There are always exceptions to prove the rule but it would not be out of line to say two words – “dream on!” – to filmmakers who think they will become rich from the earnings from one short film. Just saying.

It is possible to earn money from short films – a dribble not a torrent – but it is extremely challenging and time consuming to sift through revenue opportunities in all media, territory by territory across the world. Most of the most active buyers are in Europe.

The conventional sales route for a one-off Australian short is for the rights holders to sign the film over to a sales agent who has experience, existing contacts and market knowledge. Sales agents know which broadcasters and subscription television channels are in the market, what they want and whether the shorts will be scheduled as interstitials or as part of a program block.

Under most contracts, sales agents take a 30% commission on revenues received and want all media worldwide with the exception of the home territory – the filmmakers generally negotiate sales in their own backyard. The licence period varies and is likely to include a period of exclusivity.

Some agents are linked to festivals, some principally buy shorts for related television and online entities, some focus on certain territories. Some acquire only a dozen or two shorts per year, others hundreds.

Here are some lists of short film distributors, broadcasters and sales agents worth investigating:

- www.cannescourtmetrage.com/en/fiches – from the 2013 Cannes Film Festival
- en.unifrance.org/catalogue/distributeurs-CM.pdf

- www.making-short-films.com/film_makers/distributors/ – from Clifford Thurlow, author of the book *Making Short Films*
- worldwideshortfilmfest.com/resource-centre/selling-short/ – from the Canadian Film Centre
- www.clermont-filmfest.com/index.php?m=172
- film.britishcouncil.org/resources/shorts-animation-experimental/shorts/short-film-sales-agents.

Sales agents sell the screening rights to the films they acquire to cinemas (although rarely for shorts), television and online platforms and airlines. They may package up shorts and make them available on DVD.

They can also advise on opportunities involving big international players such as iTunes, Netflix and Amazon. It is rare for such big players to deal directly with filmmakers on short films. Instead, they use third party aggregators to acquire, package, encode, market and promote independent content on their behalf. It is difficult to keep up with new online distribution shop fronts.

Winning a major award at an A-list festival is the best way to pique the interest of sales agents because they use the major festivals to track films. Most sales agents want universal stories that deliver emotionally, are original, and have high production values and marketability. Most don't want extreme violence.

Filmmakers generally have to decide whether to hand their film over to someone else – if given the opportunity – or opt for self-distribution. A sales agent is unlikely to sign on for a film that is available online for free or for a fee.



SNAPSHOT

SBS is a big buyer of shorts

SBS Television buys about 50 Australian short films annually, making it the biggest television buyer of short films in Australia. Shorts need to have been made within the previous two years and be no more than 20 minutes in length. The rate is \$130 per minute, for play rights on SBS ONE and SBS2, and 14-day catch-up rights for SBS On Demand.

Contact: shorts@sbs.com.au.

ABC TV, unlike SBS, has no dedicated slot for short films so opportunities only arise infrequently.

The following sales agents have directly confirmed their interest in buying or representing Australian short films (as of the beginning of 2014). The companies span Poland, Germany, Spain, Ireland, France and the UK.

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Autour de Minuit

www.autourdeminuit.com/

"Our standard terms are one year renewable with a 30% commission. We can also manage submissions to festivals, in which case our commission is 40%. Granted rights are for TV, commercial and non-commercial theatrical, internet (VOD) and mobile. We buy short films and series, mainly animation or live action + animation. They can be experimental/hybrid/aesthetically innovative/original graphic worlds with solid content, with or without dialogue. The preferred duration is five to 15 minutes and the target is teenager/adults, ie families." – Annabel Sebag

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Interfilm Berlin

www.interfilm.de/en/sales/about.html

"We are quite open to all kinds of films but to narrow it down: up to 25 minutes; live action/animation; all rights cleared and available." – Christian Gesell



SNAPSHOT

Festival turned sales agent

As well as being a prominent Australian short film festival, Flickerfest is also a short film distributor and sales agent. Since 1992 it has offered to represent some of the thousands of Australian entries it receives for the annual Sydney-based event. The catalogue includes comedies, films for kids, artful animations, drama and films with Indigenous themes by Indigenous directors. The collection is marketed and distributed globally and compilations are also available on DVD from the website.

Contact: coordinator@flickerfest.com.au.

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La Luna Productions

www.lunaprod.fr

"A few years ago we acquired the short film *Tomorrow* and are interested in acquiring more shorts from Australia. Our usual terms are exclusive rights for three years, worldwide, all media. We're open to any genre and prefer films of less than 25 minutes. Our share of revenues is 30%." – Anthony Trihan

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Magnetfilm

magnetfilm.de

"I have a couple of Australian shorts in my catalogue already, most recently the short *Great Adventures*. Here are the (standard) terms: worldwide; all media; 35% distribution fee; distribution costs to be discussed (either flat or %); three-year term." – Georg Gruber.

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Monster Entertainment

www.monsterentertainment.tv

"We have the Australian shorts *Harvie Krumpet*, *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello* and *Pinata* and are very interested in more. We like films that are original both thematically and stylistically. The ability to work for a wide audience – family rather than just adult – is a bonus. It costs the same to distribute a four-minute film as it does to distribute a 30-minute film but the revenues are a proportionate fraction. Therefore, while the main criteria will always be originality and quality, size does matter. We haven't ever said 'no' to something because it was too short but 10 minutes and up is definitely more attractive." – Andrew Fitzpatrick

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New Europe Film Sales

www.neweuropefilmsales.com

"We have not acquired Australian films so far, but are open to doing so. Earlier this year we acquired a New Zealand short called *I'm Going to Mum's*. We are looking for short films of up to 20 minutes, live-action or animation. Short documentaries we only acquire as rare exceptions." – Anja Socic

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Network Ireland Television

www.network-irl-tv.com

"We are primarily interested in comedies, action, horror/supernatural/drama, in that order – and animation titles in these genres – from three to 17 minutes duration and no more than three years old. Our sales commission is 30%. We have been doing short film marketing and promotion for 18 years and are able to subsidise this activity through our sales of regular TV programs. We feel a responsibility to generate sales, have reasonable appreciation of what our buyers are looking for and believe they have come to expect a relatively high standard from our catalogue. We normally look for all media, exclusive for three years. As the market overall is so small, it doesn't make sense to split rights and confuse the market." – Derry O'Brien

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Origine Films

www.originefilms.fr/cinema/actualites/?lang=eng

"Our distribution agreements last three years and are exclusive, worldwide, all media. We take a 30% commission fee on the actual deals – rather than doing flat fee arrangements – with exploitation costs and applicable taxes deducted if there are any. We're looking for shorts of less than 20 minutes, in all genres that are recent (two to three years old). Live-action fiction is preferred but we do take documentaries and animation once in a while. We usually sign for 20 to 25 films per year and go to the four major French international markets: Trouville, Aix-en-Provence, Clermont-Ferrand and Cannes. We are producers and are always looking for potential co-production too." – Emilie Dubois



SNAPSHOT

A new kid on the block

2014 will see the launch of a new boutique sales agency by Ruth Saunders, the former Sales & Distribution Manager for the Australian Film, Television & Radio School, who spent more than 30 years entering short films in festivals, selling them to broadcasters and placing them with sales agents on behalf of the school. Her top five marketing tips are:

- Take lots of photos during production for use in marketing.
- Choose a strong distinctive title after seeing what else is around at the same time to ensure no crossover.
- Put serious thought into the synopsis and try it out on different people, not just family, friends and crew. Does it convey the feel as well as the content of the film?
- With festival entries, think before you click (and pay).
- Take more photos: it is not possible to have too many.

Contact: ruthsaundersshorts@gmail.com

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Premium Films

www.premium-films.com

"We are very interested in and have worked with many Australian films including recent acquisitions *Man on Earth* and *The Man Who Could Not Dream*. We buy up to 50 films per year, licensing the films on an exclusive basis with the standard contract being one year (renewable). The best length is 15 to 20 minutes and we mostly acquire live action films but are very open to animation. Our commission is 30%. Other Australian films we've had include *Spider*, *Monkey*, *Yardbird* and *I Love Sarah Jane*. We are very open to new ones." – Kasia Karwan.

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Short Film Agency

shortfilmsales.com

"On average we buy 12 to 20 short films per year and currently have five Australian films in our catalogue. It would be great to extend this number. It is always difficult to be on the lookout while busy with festivals. The best length is 12 to 20 minutes, although if the film quality is really striking we accept up to 29 minutes. We always seek films that are a bit edgy and/or deal with a topic from a new point of view. We don't have any genre preferences." – Korinna Wendrich

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Shorts International

www.shorts.tv

"Our catalogue is probably 60:40 English language/non English language. Daytime/family friendly is preferred. Probably 75% of the films we acquire are solely for license to our own channel Shorts TV not for full distribution deals. Terms offered vary according to the film in question. Interested filmmakers should go to the filmmaker section of our website." – Simon Young

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SND Films

www.sndfilms.com

"Most recently I have represented the Australian shorts *The Wilding* and *The Swimmer*. Deals are usually for at least two years, exclusively outside Australia, and I take a commission of 35%, no further costs deducted. Most revenue comes from Europe and some deals are made with Japan, South Korea, Latin America and North America. It all depends on the films. My preference is for well filmed comedy between five and 10 minutes with not too much dialogue. I also represent gay and lesbian shorts, animation and thrillers but comedy sells best. Generally I take 20 to 25 shorts a year – if I find good ones. I don't really care where they are from as long as they fit the catalogue and are well made. The preferred maximum length is 15 minutes but I will take longer ones if they are really good." – Sydney Neter

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Some Like It Short

www.somelikeitshort.com

"We're looking for fiction, animation, documentary at a maximum running time of 30 minutes. We acquire 25 films annually, including 20 from international. Contract terms are two years exclusive + five years non-exclusive (internet). The media covered is TV, theatrical, Internet, VOD." – Cinzia Spironello

What Remains



Do it yourself online

The internet offers a whole new world of distribution opportunities and options for directly linking films and customers. However, just making the content available is not the same as creating the desire to watch it.

As every week passes the online landscape shudders and shifts with the unpredictability of an earthquake high up on the Richter scale.

It is impossible to judge how much more powerful social media will become as an influencer of behaviour; how many people – and how quickly – will turn their backs on traditional television altogether; the speed of growth of online as the primary viewing platform; and how not-yet-invented technological developments will change the landscape.

It is cheap and easy to put a short film online and offer direct access to people worldwide, many of whom have a range of devices and are willing to squeeze bite-sized content into their day. Just making the content available, however, is not the same as creating awareness and a desire to watch. In other words, the marketing and promotion required may be far from cheap and easy.

SUGGESTION

Monetising shorts is tricky

Read the comments here to get opinions on monetising short films directly online www.shortoftheweek.com/2012/11/14/would-you-sell-your-short-film-online

Here is a diverse selection of platforms/players that filmmakers are teaming up with to get their work online:

- Click Clack clickclackshortfilms.com
- CreateSpace wwwcreatespace.com
- Distrify distrify.com
- Elevision elevision.com
- Film Annex www.filmannex.com
- FILMSshort www.filmsshort.com
- Reelhouse www.reelhouse.org
- Short of the Week www.shortoftheweek.com
- VHX www.vhx.tv
- Vimeo vimeo.com
- VODO vodo.net
- YouTube www.youtube.com.

All have their own features and offer their own tools. Content can be showcased with merchandising and other extras, linked to social media and presented for free or not. Fans can also be invited to contribute financially after viewing.

Certain platforms take a very curated approach to showcasing shorts; others encourage anyone to upload anything. Some have business models grounded in subscriptions, some are more focused on advertising and some keep experimenting in the hope of finding a way to secure their own survival.



SNIPPET

Putting a film online can be a bad idea

Making a film available online, either for free or for sale, can make it ineligible for certain festival competitions. Cannes, Berlin and Venice disqualify films that are or have been online; Sundance, SXSW and the Oscars don't.

Read more here www.shortoftheweek.com/2013/05/31/list-of-festivals-and-online-eligibility/

Many filmmakers are putting a lot of effort into building a personal online fan base to draw on in future: to get bumps on seats, political support or money via crowd funding. Those with unique voices or niche appeal are likely to have the most success.

If building a following is the aim, and the content and audience potential of the short suits that aim, viewers will have to be engaged and their details captured for future exploitation. Research the best methods and remember that impatience reigns online.

Be aware that putting a film behind a pay wall undermines its accessibility but also that buyers and sales agents frown upon films that are freely available online. Festivals are no longer so disapproving yet if two films are being weighed up against each other for a last competitive spot, the one that is online is unlikely to be chosen.

There is a giant ecosystem of niche audiences a keyboard away but they are not easy to pin down. And one person with power and influence can be more useful than 1,000 without.

Butterflies



Here's some further general reading:

- A short film marketing guide by filmmaker Nigel R Smith for Scottish Screen www.scottishscreen.com/images/documents/short_film_distribution_guide.pdf
- Thoughtful articles at www.shortoftheweek.com
- Handy hints from filmmaker and author Clifford Thurlow www.making-short-films.com
- The BAFTA website has a section devoted to short film production and marketing guru.bafta.org/shorts
- The BBC has information about shorts in its filmmaking guide www.bbc.co.uk/filmnetwork/filmmaking/guide/introduction/filmnetwork/guide/introduction/good-short
- An article from a website exploring artists' use of technology and innovation thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/the-future-of-the-short-film-amid-new-distribution-options
- On filmmakers protecting their rights in contracts blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/international-film-distribution-101
- Online directories covering film festivals and news about those festivals. www.festivalfocus.org and www.filmfestivals.com
- The following website has a useful calendar showing major festival deadlines www.thetakes.com/festivals

Good luck!



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