



Screen Australia Industry Support Programs

Stage 2 Review

Response from Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF)

1.0 Introduction

Established in 1952, the Melbourne International Film Festival (**MIFF**) is one of the world's oldest film festivals and the Southern Hemisphere's largest. With 2008 attendance at approximately 185,000, the Festival has a large, dedicated and growing audience with a well-established public profile as a major event on the Australian calendar.

The Festival is a unique event in Australia, with a vibrant screening program, a loyal audience, and industry initiatives providing opportunities for Australian filmmakers at many levels. In recent years, MIFF has successfully extended its activities to include a raft of industry and filmmaker focussed programs to complement its core business, the screening program. These are:

- **Accelerator**, a 4-day educational and inspirational skills development program for up-and-coming directors with short films screening at MIFF;
- **MIFF 37°South Market**, a 4-day film financing market for producers with market-ready projects pitching to potential international and local co-financing partners;
- **MIFF Premiere Fund**. MIFF's investment and loan fund, providing essential financing support for local feature-length films and documentaries. In its first year, the MIFF Premiere Fund films accounted for six of the 10 world premieres at MIFF. Four of the six MIFF Premiere Fund films were sell-out screenings.

In addition to its core business, the clear focus of these three programs is to provide a pathway for development for filmmakers from the beginning of their career (post sheltered film school environment) into the real world of film business, international financing and onwards into producing new and challenging Australian cinema for audiences. MIFF's industry programs are designed to create relationships and assist filmmakers at every level of their filmmaking journey.

2.0 Consultation Process to date

MIFF is concerned at the limited timeframe for comment for the Screen Australia Industry Support programs, particularly vis a vis the thorough process afforded to Production and Development. We are concerned that this cursory process reflects the low priorities surrounding Screen Australia's Industry support programs. We regard festivals as important players in the grand scheme of getting films to market and connecting to

domestic audiences. This is, after all, one of the key challenges facing the Australian film industry. Furthermore, if our understanding that the marketing budget has already been set at a mere \$200,000 more than the previous AFC budget is correct, it would seem that there is very limited scope in this area for any new initiatives.

3.0 Addressing Marketing Support and Promotion

3.1 Industry and Cultural Development funding program

MIFF recommends that Screen Australia maintain and **enhance** existing **festival funding** through the **Industry and Cultural Development funding programs** based on a general audience development imperative, particularly for local product. Film festivals are a key part of broadening audience tastes and acting as launch pads for new Australian films. With release schedules of the major distributors/exhibitors already crowded, festivals will become increasingly important in nurturing a thriving Australian screen culture sector.

As Screen Australia will be aware this argument and approach has been adopted by the UK Film Council with their P&A scheme, open to all specialist films, not just local product. The UK Film Council assists non-USA films with P&A and festival support. This program clearly acknowledges the role of the festivals in providing a unique learning environment for the industry and public alike.

Screen Australia should note the UKFC's massive increase for festival funding with their special **Festivals Fund**, which provides major funding to Edinburgh and London Film Festivals.

3.2 Support for production of marketing/screening materials.

MIFF believes that film distribution should be supported and full guidelines should be established for the **Theatrical P&A Marketing Support** fund. Such P&A support should go beyond the standard funding for a release to also consider special funding to assist with the festival premieres of Australian (and perhaps other) films. This assistance could go towards covering the costs associated with talent and media attending, panels and workshops specifically around the Festival premiere and launch.

To demonstrate MIFF's typical support for Australia films, we are including a case study of the costs MIFF allocated to a new title from MIFF's 2008 festival. This case study is based on an actual film, however the title is not mentioned here for reasons of confidentiality.

The first-run Australian film screened twice on the second weekend of the festival, both sessions at the Greater Union cinema. The premiere screening sold-out. The second screening was in one of the smaller cinemas at Greater Union. The total box office taken over the two screenings was \$4888.00.

Red-Carpet Event			Cost
Payment to distributor			
(2 screenings based on 25% Box office)			\$1222
Guests	Director	Flights and Accom	\$750
	Actor 1	Flights and Accom	\$750
	Actor 2	Flights and Accom	\$750

Actor 3	Accom only	\$500
Actor 4	Accom only	\$500
7 other guests attended at their own cost.		

Premiere After-Party

Bar tab for filmmakers and 50 of their guests	\$1200.00
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Comp tickets for filmmakers and distributors

55 comps at \$16.50 value	\$907.50
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TOTAL COST	\$6579.50
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Publicity

Additionally, MIFF generated ***\$69,778** worth of publicity for this particular film in the lead up to the screening.

[*This figure is based on the accumulated value of each specific article on a page/space dollar value. MIFF calculates the dollar value of generated publicity based on standard PR industry practices.]

Clearly it is within MIFF's remit to provide a platform and an environment for the release of new Australian films. However, as the figures indicate, it's a losing economic proposition for MIFF, and we believe this type of activity should be supported by Screen Australia.

3.3 Sales (Domestic and International)

As MIFF is an investor via MIFF's Premiere Fund, MIFF is now also in a position to comment on both sales and distribution support of Australian films. MIFF believes Screen Australia should engage in **Sales** support of Australian films. Local films are at a MAJOR disadvantage relative to European films. European films are eligible for distribution assistance via MEDIA's non-national European release scheme. For example, a German distributor deciding between a small Irish or Australian film would give preference to the Irish film knowing MEDIA distribution funding is available for the cinema release. Meantime, for instance, an Italian film with a French sales agent would be eligible for European Film Promotion (EFP) support if the sales agent plans to platform the film in, say, Latin America at a festival.

The EFP sales agent support scheme is very modest in providing support for sales agents platforming European films outside Europe (travel assistance, registration assistance and subtitling assistance) and could easily be replicated by Screen Australia. There are also even smaller schemes operating with UKFC and IFB to support territory missions by delegations of sales agents representing UK and Irish films.

3.4 International Cultural Programs / Promotions /Embassy Road shows / International festival / market presence.

MIFF feels it has a lot to contribute to international cultural presentations on Australian film, particularly in the curatorial sphere. As expected MIFF previews every new Australian film and documentary; importantly we are able to contextualise Australian film against

trends and developments in world cinema. Furthermore, as a result of working closely with the producer, directors and actors in a festival environment, including conducting forums for feedback, MIFF has a direct relationship with filmmakers on the ground. In brief, we feel this expertise could be used to put together programs for International showcases, whether through the "Embassy Roadshow" or via events such as "G'Day Australia".

With regard to the representation of Australian film at overseas festivals / markets, MIFF believes that there are potential synergies between the efforts of Screen Australia and MIFF (and other Australian festivals). While we understand that Screen Australia would not want to give preference to one festival over another, the entire industry can benefit from assistance and representation at festivals and markets. In the last month alone MIFF has been contacted by four separate international film festivals for advice on Australian film for their 2009 programs. The parallels between our joint activities in representing Australian film at festivals and markets are obvious.

4.0 In summary, MIFF recommends:

From the perspective of MIFF's Premiere Fund

- P&A distribution support should be boosted and have clear, open and transparent guidelines and also introduce an Australia Festival launch support scheme.
- Introduce specific sales agent support for efforts at representing Australian films internationally.

From main MIFF and MIFF 37°South Market's perspective:

- Maintain and enhance Festival organisational funding with UKFC example in mind.
- Investigate synergetic relationships between festivals and Screen Australia's international marketplace activities.

5.0 In conclusion

MIFF hopes there is a real opportunity to enter into a dialogue regarding Screen Australia's Industry support programs and believes that festivals have a vital role to play in this regard. We are concerned that marketing, audience development, screen culture and distribution/sales support are not given the same priority as development and production. MIFF believes that the success of the production sector is co-dependant on the health of film sales, distribution, marketing, cinema and festival exhibition.

Melbourne International Film Festival

Richard Moore, Executive Director