

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Free Range Distribution It's Viable for Sundance and Slamdance Films

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, January 21st, 2015

Inside Track for Independent Filmmakers, my new book that gives step-by-step instructions for filmmakers to get their movies made and seen, shares important tips on the newest distribution frontier. Call it *Free Range Distribution*, which captures the energy and Wild West experience you'll find here. (It's a term I learned from my friends at [Seed & Spark](#), an organization that supports and facilitates independent filmmaking.)

If you're a filmmaker with a film at Sundance or Slamdance, or if you want to be, you may find that Free Range Distribution is a viable option for getting your work in front of your audience. If you're in the audience, and you want to see films that aren't "big" enough for traditional distribution, you may find that Free Range Distribution is the best hope you'll have of encountering movies that fit your taste.

[alert type=alert-white][ADAM LEIPZIG'S BOOK FOR INDIE FILMMAKERS AVAILABLE FROM BEDFORD/ST. MARTIN'S](#)[/alert]

What is Free Range Distribution?

Free Range Distribution platforms are websites that make it possible for filmmakers to sell or rent their movies. In a digital setting, a "sale" can be defined as a download that the customer can keep forever, and a "rental" is a streaming or viewing opportunity that expires within a certain period of time, usually 24 to 72 hours. Sale prices are typically higher than rental prices.

These distribution platforms go well beyond the monetization strategies of more basic sites like YouTube, where interaction is limited to advertising or requesting a donation. Instead, these platforms allow you to have a direct, transactional relationship with individual audience members.

Some Free Range Distribution sites are open to everyone, such as Vimeo, which allows you to upload and sell your movie as long as you subscribe to its Pro service. Other ones are more selective and require a submissions and acceptance process. I prefer these selective platforms because there are fewer movies on them, and their curation procedure establishes a certain level of quality. At the same time, they charge more for their services, through either a setup fee or a share of revenue.

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If you're a filmmaker interested in exploring the Free Range Distribution option, you need to do your homework. There are many Free Range Distribution platforms available (some are listed in the Essential Resources section of my book), and because this is an emerging and fluid marketplace, their terms and offerings change frequently. Look for a platform that has been successful for films similar to yours and that has the features most important to you.

If you select a platform that has a submissions procedure, study it carefully and make sure you have all your materials in order. Often, staff members are available by email or phone to help guide you through the process, and to answer questions as you determine if this is the right platform for you.

It's a good idea to be in touch with your potential Free Range distributors early on in your filmmaking journey, even before your movie is finished. You'll learn what is possible and what is not, and it will be just one more step in planning your release strategy well before you premiere your film—which is exactly what the big studios do.



A frame from the Indiegogo campaign for 'Across the Sea,' a first feature directed by Esra Saydam and Nisan Dag. screening at Slamdance 2015

However, no matter which Free Range Distribution platform you choose, be prepared: you must be your own marketing department. For any creative entrepreneur, in any field, this job requirement is the most important and the most uncomfortable.

Let's look at discomfort and importance.

For creative people, those of us who work primarily alone in coffee shops or studios, it is truly difficult to step into the public sphere and trumpet their own stuff. This is true for filmmakers as well, even though there's a lot of social activity involved in on-set camaraderie. When your movie's done, you'll probably feel the film will speak for itself.

Newsflash: it won't. It's your job to speak up for it. You must demonstrate to the world how important your film is, and you do this by talking about it, in every medium, at every chance you get.

If you choose Free Range Distribution, marketing is 100% a requirement, and you must build out and execute your own marketing plan. Movie tickets—or downloads—are not going to sell themselves. You must bring the audience to your film, hold their hands, entice and encourage them, and, finally, get their money.

[alert type=alert-red]**Special Sundance + Slamdance Promotion Jan. 22 – Feb. 1 only!**

1. Buy *Inside Track for Independent Filmmakers* at Dolly's Bookstore on Main St. in Park City.

2. Take a creative photo of the book somewhere in Park City.

3. Email your photo to adam@adamleipzig.com and you'll get FREE his popular Crowdfunding webinar, a \$15 value.

Details at Dolly's Bookstore.[/alert]

How do you prepare yourself? Fortunately, marketing is not magic; it simply requires that you plan for it, and that you have a clear understanding of your film. You need to:

- Know what your film is about.
- Know who your audience is with great specificity. Your film is not “for everybody.” By definition, each independent movie has a clear-cut, distinct niche audience, not a general demographic.
- Know the size and duration of your social media following (and the social media following of your actors and creative team). You need to build it up over the year you are making your movie, so they are waiting for you on the day you release.
- If you did a crowdfunding campaign, which is a good idea as an audience-engagement tool, maintain a strong relationship with the contributors (and the people who peeked but did not contribute), so you are ready to turn them into your core advocates.

If you and your team take these steps, you’ll be well on your way.

In case you didn’t notice, you have just become the Chief Marketing Officer of your very own film company! That, along with persistence, talent, passion and big ideas, is one of the essential attributes of successful independent filmmakers today.

Buy *Inside Track for Independent Filmmakers* here.

This article is adapted from *Inside Track for Independent Filmmakers* by Adam Leipzig. Copyright © 2015 by Bedford/St. Martin’s. Used with permission of the publisher.

Top image: ‘Western’ / U.S.A., Mexico (Directors: Bill Ross, Turner Ross), screens in the Sundance 2015 U.S. Documentary Competition. Photo courtesy Sundance Institute.

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