



# HOW TO SELL YOUR MOVIE

A 5 STEP APPROACH TO GETTING SALES FOR YOUR FILM

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## STEP 1: **CAST NAME ACTORS**

This is as simple as I can make it. Name actors = sales for your film. The issue comes when new filmmakers believe "there's no way I can get a name actor for my film." Get that belief out of your head! Actors want to work! All of them.

What you have to do is supply them with quality material, and a vision to pull it off. It all starts with the screenplay. If the screenplay is fantastic, actors seem to come out of the woodwork.

I've heard MANY Directors and Producers say, "I don't want to cast name actors. I just want great actors in each role." Look, it's fine to want great actors. Can't you have both? In fact, if the actor is a name actor, chances are he or she is great! So now you have someone who can help you sell your movie AND a great actor.

Do not be intimidated by agents or managers demanding huge amounts of money for their clients. That's their job. But for every actor who has an agent/manager who only considers big paydays, there's another actor who wants great material. **That's where you come in.**

Use every connection you have, call in favors, do whatever you've got to do. If you have a killer script, you NEED to get it in the hands of star talent. Then the actor can decide whether he or she wants the role, and the agent or manager will have to listen.

In dealing with markets for almost 20 years, I have heard repeatedly, from almost every buyer, "We need cast." Meaning they won't consider buying the film unless there's a sellable name. Doesn't have to be Brad Pitt. But he or she does have to be a recognizable, marketable face.



## STEP 2: **PICK A SELLABLE GENRE**

You'll set yourself up for future sales success for your film by picking a genre that sells. I don't want to discourage you if your heart is set on your difficult, edgy drama. Please prove me wrong and take that all the way to the Oscars. What I will say, is that historically, that is the toughest genre to sell. Unfortunately, that seems to be what every indie filmmaker wants to make.

In the sales markets, I hear the same thing, over and over again, when I pose this question to buyers, "What genres are you looking for?" Their response, almost unilaterally, is:

Action, Sci-Fi, Horror with cast, or family friendly rom-coms (romantic comedies), or family friendly comedies/dramas.

**Anything too edgy is always a tough sell.**

Action seems to play everywhere because it's a universal language. Martial arts, explosions, suspenseful scenes... these are all iconic for the entire world. The issue with horror is that there is SO many horror films made per year, that they almost need cast these days to make a splash.

One thing to note is that if the film is family friendly, meaning no cursing, no sex, no drugs, the film becomes sellable even with minimal names. Those films have a market because films that families can watch together are somewhat rare.

Your best move is to pick a successful genre up front. The reason to do this is because, at that point, you're going by what the market is looking for.



## STEP 3: **ADD PRODUCTION VALUE**

One of the best ways to ensure success for your film is to make a film that looks exponentially better than the budget of what you made it for. Imagine if you could make a \$200,000 film look like a \$2 million film? That would be setting yourself up for success from the start.

The way to do this is to focus on soft money. Soft money is anything other than a cash investment in your film. Soft money could be a free location that looks amazing. Soft money could be the Alexa camera that your DP is bringing as a value add. Soft money could be an organization that helps you by bringing background actors to a scene, just for the PR.

Any of those examples above illustrate ways that you can bring production value to your film. **If the film looks bigger thanks to the sets, the camera, or a realistic background scene, you're in great shape, and it didn't add anything to the budget.**

Even when I've made a low budget film, I've always tried to focus on trying to make it look as big as possible. That way, the budget is never questioned when it comes time to sell the movie. Meaning, if when you're selling your film, and someone can ask you, "you shot this for \$75,000, right?" that's bad. Even if you were to pull off a film that low, you'd want someone to think that you had half a million dollars for the budget.

When you're making a film, it's magnetic. People want to help you out. You need to take advantage of this and get as much in regards to value that you can. This will ultimately help the end result. Even something as trivial as a free location allows for you to put more money up on the screen.



## STEP 4: **GO TO MARKETS**

There are three major film markets per year. They are the EFM (The European Film Market) in Berlin, Germany, the Marché Du Film (The Cannes Film Market) in Cannes, France, and the AFM (The American Film Market) in Santa Monica, CA.

Film markets are not film festivals. Whereas film festivals are events where you screen your film to an audience and mingle with people in the industry, film markets are basically trade shows for selling movies. The entire goal of each of the aforementioned markets is to do deals on films.

### **This is where you need to be.**

Navigating the film markets can be intimidating and overwhelming, but there's a simple cure for that: experience. The more markets you go to, the more you start to understand the inner workings of them. I've made invaluable connections just by attending and being friendly and talking to people.

If you have a finished film, the markets are perfect for you. You can make appointments with companies prior to attending, and then take meetings and pitch your films to the company's acquisitions executive. If you don't have a completed film, you can use this time to make valuable connections that will aide you don't the road.

No matter if you have an actual completed film to sell, or something in the pipeline, you need to have a good pitch prepared. Then you pitch, get the contact info (business card or digital info) of the person or group whom you are pitching, and **FOLLOW UP!**

Besides meeting actual distributors and sales agents, you can also attend conferences and listen to panels about topics that will help you immensely!



## STEP 5: **SEND SCREENERS/CLOSE THE DEAL**

Those contacts to sales agents and distributors who you've met at the markets? Now it's time to reach out to all of them, and send screeners of your film. This is most likely done as a password protected Vimeo file.

**Make sure your film is in the best shape possible before doing this!**

Perhaps do a screening amongst colleagues that will give you objective feedback as to if anything is missing or could be improved.

Once you have the absolutely best version of your film, that's when you send it out, and be ready to get some passes. If you have 30 connections from the markets, you're most likely not going to get 30 offers. All you really need is one good offer.

But let's say you've got three offers coming in for your film. The first thing to do is to research the company who is making the offer. Go to IMDBPro and find out some other films that they've distributed or sold. Contact the Producers of a couple of these films and ask about their experience with this company. I've found Producers are happy to share both positive and negative experiences.

Then you can make your best choice as to who to go with. It's now time to engage an entertainment attorney to help you finalize the contract. Be careful here. Some attorneys redline a contract just because they think it's their job to find fault in every contract. You should try to understand all points. I've seen filmmakers lose deals because the attorney made too many changes to a fair contract.

Once the deal is closed, it's time to celebrate... you've sold your film! But it's not time to quit. You need to continually follow up with the sales agent and/or distributor and see if you can add value to help the release of the film become successful.

Then you use this success to start setting up your next film!

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