

FDA Guide to UK Film Distribution

We warmly invite you to trace a film's vital journey to reach cinema audiences.
You'll go step by step (or scene by scene) throughout the process.
Please print off and share any section if you need to do so, or follow the links for further info.

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AND THEN WHAT?

The story of a film's journey to the cinema screen

PROLOGUE

INT. EDIT SUITE

A MAN and a WOMAN are standing watching a bank of computer screens. An EDITOR is sitting down in front of them, playing with a keyboard, tweaking things. Titles are scrolling down one of the screens against a black background, the two either side have freeze frames of images of a man and a woman, out of focus, kissing on a park bench. It is raining, but the young lovers appear not to care. The rain has created a colourful pattern on the screen.

CUT TO:

CU of central screen with titles. The very end credits and print logos scroll up.

We pull out to see the woman clapping her hands with delight. The man smiles rather smugly.

WOMAN (DIRECTOR)

Fantastic, that's it! The film's locked!

MAN (PRODUCER)

Yep, I'm really pleased. You've *absolutely* nailed it. People are going to love it. We can't possibly fail! 'And then What?' has got to be a big hit...

DIRECTOR

So what happens now?

PRODUCER

Well, now comes the tricky part...

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 1

INTRODUCTION

This is really where our story starts. It's the 'what happens next' to all films.

Films can be conceived in a variety of ways. Sparked by a unique moment of inspiration, maybe an adaptation of a carefully chosen book, a true life story, an historical figure, an event, a moment in time. Any number of creative avenues may be explored and passion projects put up on screen.

The *making* of that film will then undoubtedly become a labour of love for many years.

But the stronger the labour to create a film, the greater the desire to ensure it finds exposure beyond those immediately connected with it.

Film is about *shared experiences*, about letting everyone in to enjoy a time of escapism, be it through drama and excitement, comedy or tragedy.

Films have the power to inspire, to convey strong emotions, to express what people want to say, but cannot necessarily find the words themselves. That's why films somehow have to move away from a computer screen and be put in front of the largest audience possible; and why a cinema screen provides the *best* opportunity to do so.

"As a filmmaker, I know only too well that films do not exist for their own sakes... they only exist when they are experienced by an audience."

Sir Alan Parker CBE

This is precisely the role that **film distribution** fulfils. But first, the distributor must be brought on board.

SCENE 2

LORD PUTTNAM ON THE ROLE OF DISTRIBUTION

Lord Puttnam of Queensgate CBE is President of Film Distributors' Association

Movies are capable of enriching pretty well every aspect of our lives. They retain an extraordinary power to amaze as much as amuse us. Beyond that, they influence the games we enjoy, the music we play, and they inspire the fashions and advertising images that spring up all around us.

But films can have an impact, both commercial and social, *only* to the extent that they truly connect with their audience. Like any other product, films only come to life when they invade the consciousness of the citizens – consumers – for whom they were intended.

It is the task of *distributors* to identify and deliver the largest possible audience for every film.

This is no small task, particularly when so many other entertainment options are available both inside and outside the home; and that is in addition to the 500 or more titles released in UK cinemas every year. But research confirms that most cinemagoers know in advance which film they want to see – and that's principally due to competing distributors' efforts to promote interest in the title(s) they are handling.

Tailor-made, audience-focused distribution is, and will remain, vital to the prospects of individual films, and to the industry as a whole, whatever the medium or format in question. Every element of the communications and entertainment industry has been – and is – undergoing rapid change. The advent of 'digital' in the cinema sector has not merely resulted in a change of format, succeeding 35mm presentation, but it has had a *transformative* impact. Digital has remodelled the ways in which films are released, promoted and consumed, and it is reshaping the kind of entertainment centre that a modern cinema can be.

Yet a few fundamentals remain rock-solid. Sharing great stories has always been part of human nature, and *filmed* stories look and sound their very best in the cinema. During the continual changes and challenges of recent years, UK cinema-going has been remarkably resilient. In fact when compared to many other sectors, it has remained positively buoyant, thanks in no small measure to the inability of any other medium to match the *immersive* experience that the cinema offers.

With this guide, you can look through the eyes (or lens!) of a distributor and consider how *you* might launch a film. What sort of business considerations would you take into account, and what are the key decisions you must weigh up? It's my most sincere hope that you enjoy exploring the essential life of a film beyond its production phase, and that this brief insight will make you want to discover even more.

SCENE 3

SO WHAT EXACTLY DO DISTRIBUTORS DO?

Distribution is the *highly competitive business* of launching and sustaining films in the market place. Films don't become talking points, or find their place in the world, by accident. The distributor's challenge is to bring each one to market by:

- identifying its audience
- considering *why* they'd go and see it
- estimating the revenue potential across all the formats of its release
- persuading exhibitors (cinema operators) to play the film
- developing plans and partnerships to build awareness of and interest in the film
- aiming to convert as much interest as possible into cinema visits

Like other forms of entertainment, the film business is *product-driven*: the films themselves are the main reason for buying tickets. There's an insatiable, deep-rooted desire for great stories on screen as well as in print. But today more than ever, consumers call the shots, deciding for themselves what information or 'content' to receive or reject, access or delete.

SCENE 4

WHO ARE THE DISTRIBUTORS?

As is the case in most territories (countries), the UK has six *major* distributors (directly affiliated to the Hollywood studios) and many *independent* (unaffiliated) distributors who tend to handle films made outside the major studios.

A list of the companies in the trade body, Film Distributors' Association (FDA), appears on page [46].

SCENE 5

HOW DO DISTRIBUTORS GET THEIR FILMS?

UK distributors acquire the films they release from one or more of various sources:

- a third-party sales agent, acting on behalf of a producer
- a continuous flow of new content from a parent studio
- a studio or production company with whom the distributor has negotiated an output deal covering a slate of titles
- a single title acquired at any stage before, during or after production

TAKE 1

The larger studios may often work with major producers, and get 'first look' deals on the films they want to produce, help to finance them provide studio shooting and post-production facilities and ultimately, if they are happy that the final film is commercial and/or award-friendly, distribute them, taking the rights in the *domestic* market (US and Canada) and/or *international* (the rest of the world – ROW).

Sometimes, and particularly with big budget blockbusters, a studio will sell off the international rights to another major international distributor (that way, alleviating its own cost burden). On occasion, those rights might be sold off to a number of independent distributors, each handling a specific territory(ies).

TAKE 2

The independent distributors, some of whom might have global affiliations rather than a truly global presence, will more frequently acquire their films from independent producers.

Various 'markets' take place throughout the year, often associated or timed to coincide with big film festivals where **sales agents** will meet with lots of distributors to try to sell films at concept, draft script, filming/post-production, or indeed, at non-final or finished film stages.

If you have responsibility for **acquisitions** for a major or an independent distributor, a film festival market is like being in a big bazaar. You don't necessarily get to see everything, but once there is a 'sniff' that something really good has just been unveiled and 'rights' are available, everyone wants to haggle for the latest hot property.

ACQUISITIONS

As films are creative works – *intellectual property* rather than physical goods – their copyright is owned by the people or organisations that produce or finance them. Copyright systems entitle creators to receive a fair return for the risks they take in innovation and investment. In bringing films to market, distributors act under license on their behalf.

When considering acquiring a new film, distributors will look for distinguishing features that may help sell it to audiences. Is there something original or outstanding? A fresh angle or 'hook' that could be a springboard for a marketing or publicity campaign?

Distributors recognise the importance of *local* product. British audiences naturally warm to good quality British films, Irish audiences to Irish stories, and so on.

A film's *marketability* (how it can be promoted to its particular audience) and *playability* (how it actually performs in the market place) are not necessarily the same thing.

Distributors will consider *who is the target audience* – who does the film 'speak to' most of all, and then who else might be attracted? Do the story, characters and situation grip the intended audience? Does the film 'deliver' and justify the costs of a theatrical release?

A distributor's opinion on a film's marketability may, and really should, be sought even before it goes into production. Generally it's preferable for a distribution deal to be in place before principal photography begins. This may be viable on the basis of a hot script, director or anticipated cast.

The larger the production budget, the more likely a film is to have a distributor signed up before all its financing is confirmed; indeed, no distribution pre-sales may make it harder to finance a new production from other sources. In practice, producers tend to seek finance from multiple sources, including:

- pre-sales to distributors in various territories via a specialist sales agent
- bank loans (subject to prevailing economic conditions)
- institutional investors
- private individuals
- beneficial tax schemes
- public subsidies (the available National Lottery funding for film is awarded by the British Film Institute – see www.bfi.org.uk)

When acquiring films, another major consideration is 'ancillary sales'.

Only exceptionally will a film make a profit from its cinema release alone. Distributors will often review the 'downward chain' before committing to a new film – i.e. DVD/Blu-ray/digital downloads; Video on demand platforms (VOD); AVOD (Airline VOD); Pay-per-view TV (e.g. Sky/Virgin); Free-to-air TV (Freeview); and then 'non-theatrical' sales (e.g. hotels, cruise ships).

FILM FINANCING

No fixed formulae apply to film financing or advances. Each case is affected by variables such as the film property itself, the script, cast and market conditions.

Often a distributor becomes a partner in a project, contributing to its development/production costs and later bringing it to market. In some cases, the distributor may pay an advance/minimum guarantee against future earnings to the producer or sales agent. An advance commitment is made for the distribution license rights plus the costs of theatrical prints and advertising (P&A).

Distributors prepare reports for the producer or rights owner, detailing the marketing spend, together with forecast and actual theatrical revenues. As laid down in the distribution contract, such reports are submitted at least quarterly in the first year following launch and usually twice yearly thereafter.

FILM FESTIVALS

There are dozens of busy film festivals in towns and cities worldwide, but the main annual events attended by thousands of international film buyers and sellers, and almost as many journalists, are presently at Sundance, Berlin, Cannes, Venice and Toronto.

These festivals, each with their own personality, serve various functions:

- a market, where distributors seeking to acquire product may meet with sellers (agents, producers, studios);
- a competition, where new titles may be screened to juries of filmmakers and awarded prizes. Such accolades flashed on a film's poster can add prestige but may also pigeon-hole it as 'arty';
- a high-profile platform where films can be showcased prior to release.

Distributors sometimes choose to launch films at a suitable international festival, where critics and insiders may discover them and go on to champion them in early reviews and columns. The eyes of the film world and the mass media are focused on the leading festivals, such as Cannes (below) in May, which accommodates many premieres and junkets. Trade papers publish daily editions in print and online for industry members and journalists. Other important events in the international calendar include the American Film Market in Santa Monica, and the *Mercato Internazionale Film e Documentario* (MIFED) in Milan.

Dozens of film festivals take place around the UK, with a variety of themes and purposes. The top festivals aimed mainly at public audiences, in Edinburgh (summer) and London (autumn), showcase a panorama of new cinema from Britain and around the world but neither has a market attached.

SCENE 6

MAKING A DISTRIBUTION DEAL

INT. OFFICE. Thick reams of typed papers sit in piles on a sleek, modern desk in a glass office. A woman is poring over one of the documents with a red pen in her hand, making notes in the margin as she reads. Front page of 'And Then What?' is clearly visible, placed on her left at an angle.

Distributors sign a formal contract with the producer, sales agent or studio, specifying the rights they hold in respect of the title. These normally include the right to release it in UK cinemas and promote it in all media before and during its release.

There may also be provision for the film to be edited locally (or not) in order to secure a particular classification. The contract will set out how the income from the release is to be apportioned and accounted for, and set a date on which the distribution license expires.

Distributors normally seek to acquire *all available rights* in their particular territory, spreading the risk and opportunity across multiple platforms. So importantly, in addition to the theatrical window, the contract usually includes the further right to license the film for home/mobile entertainment and to UK broadcasters.

If, however, a broadcaster has contributed to the financing of a film, it is likely to have pre-secured television rights as part of the deal, in which case the rights available to a distributor would exclude TV.

Some theatrical distributors do not handle distribution in other formats, but they will have sister companies or business partners that do so.

SCENE 7

PLANNING THE RELEASE

So the deal is signed. '*And Then What?*' is on its way to a theatrical release. Planning starts as soon as the signatures are dry on the paper and a title hits the slate.

Sometimes, as in the above example, the film is more or less 'locked' (i.e. completed) so the distributor can see exactly what they're dealing with. They'll know how well, or otherwise, the movie has actually turned out, how it is shot, how strongly the cast performs.

On other occasions, it's not as clear. A distributor might only be aware of a title (possibly a 'working' title), have read the script, be aware of the confirmed (or potential) cast, and met the director/producers to understand their vision. They would know if the director is a seasoned filmmaker or a first-timer, and if the story is original or adapted from a popular book or a TV series.

Either way, a *distribution plan* needs to be prepared.

The distributor will develop this in consultation with the producers and/or studio as appropriate.

SCENE 8

WHAT, WHEN, WHO, HOW?

The most important strategic decisions a distributor makes are *when* and *how* to release a film in order to optimise its chances. Through a combination of market knowledge, commercial experience, statistical research and professional judgement, distributors gauge the audience for each film.

Who is the film for? Who can be convinced to buy a cinema ticket to see it and why should they do so? Can the film be positioned within a popular, recognisable genre? What sort of audiences have similar films attracted recently? When were they released? How strong is the cast?

When distributors have estimated what a film may earn, they prepare a **budget** to release it. As with every business plan, the goal is to recoup the costs and turn a profit. But launching films is expensive and risky – audiences have so many other choices – and in reality, most films do not make a profit from their theatrical runs alone (see Acquisitions).

When planning a new release, relying solely on conventional wisdom is never an option. Early information can be gleaned by reading the script and from discussions with the filmmakers, but every release is a one-off and individually planned given current circumstances. Final distribution plans can often be confirmed only when the finished film is available to view.

TAKE 1

WHAT KIND OF FILM IS IT?

- Is it an *event* film, a prospective mass market blockbuster, or a *specialised* film for a more discrete audience?
- Is there any *star power* among the cast? What were the lead star's last couple of films and how were they received commercially and critically? Do they have an engaged online audience/followers on social media? Is the film made by a 'name' director or producer?
- Are any cast members available for UK/international publicity or to attend a premiere?
- Could the film lead the media reviews of that week's new releases? This profile can be very important for more specialised films.
- Is it a film with hopes for award nominations? Contenders for the Academy Awards®, Golden Globes and EE British Academy Film Awards often open in the UK between October–February, when the annual awards season reaches its peak, although this can cause a bottleneck in an already congested release schedule.
- Is there already a buzz about the film, due to its stars or makers, a book on which it is based, an early festival screening that attracted attention, or perhaps some controversial subject matter? What is posted about the film online?
- If it is a sequel or franchise entry, what elements *distinguish* it and add contemporary resonance over and above its predecessor(s)?

- Has the film already opened in the US or elsewhere? Substantial success in the US, reported via websites and other media, can contribute to positive word of mouth in the UK – although this can work both ways, as a disappointing performance overseas may adversely affect perceptions here.
- What certificate will the film have? The certificate awarded by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is important as it can affect the potential audience. Distributors submit a copy of each film to the BBFC for classification as soon as possible, paying a fee according to the film's length. You'll find consumer advice about the content included in a panel on the film's advertising and at www.bbfc.co.uk.

The certificate can have a major impact on the success or otherwise of a film. For instance, the box-office potential of an 18-rated movie is highly likely to be more limited than that of films in lower categories; whereas a thriller rated 12A may be deemed too 'soft' for an aspirational audience. But a rounded action movie would probably get a 12A, allowing a broad audience to see it. And of course, a 'children's/family' film getting a higher rating than a U or PG would be very bad for business.

TAKE 2

WHEN SHOULD IT GO OUT?

Competition is always a primary consideration.

Which films are other distributors likely to release at the same time and during the following weeks – especially those targeted at a similar audience? Is there space in the market for something different – some 'counter-programming'? Are the most appropriate 2D and/or 3D screens for this film available and likely to be offered? Projected release dates often change as competing distributors jockey for position week by week.

Competition may not necessarily be restricted to other films. Distributors must take account of the release of major game franchises (which can distract a 16–24 male audience in particular), or the live finals of popular reality shows (e.g. *The X-Factor*, *The Voice*, *Strictly Come Dancing*).

Of critical importance, too, are sporting events. Football matches, particularly in the World Cup and Euros, can swallow up key audiences for several weeks/weekends. Across the summer of 2012, the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the European Football Championships and the London Olympics and Paralympics caused scheduling headaches for distributors. With audiences distracted by our home-grown medal-winning Olympics team, securing an ideal date for a release that summer was particularly tough. If film talent didn't visit because their preferred accommodation in London wasn't available, it would be harder to generate publicity anyway.

Dating: Is it a film for a holiday period? If so, which season? School holiday dates may vary around the UK, and with those in other countries. What kinds of films have been released successfully in particular slots in previous years?

TAKE 3

WHERE SHOULD IT GO?

As distributors review what kind of film they have, they will begin to form assumptions as to the type of release they need. In total, across the UK and Republic of Ireland, 850 cinemas with more than 4,000 screens are available.

Different releases are managed in different ways. For example, a saturation release 'at cinemas everywhere' may open simultaneously on 1,000 screens UK-wide, playing at two or more screens per multiplex. This strategy, usually deployed for 'tentpole' titles such as large-scale sequels or star-led holiday releases, helps to accommodate mass audiences eager to consume a film at the earliest opportunity.

By contrast, specialised films offer a different cinematic experience. The UK release of, say, a documentary, foreign language film or revived classic may comprise 25 prints or fewer. Initially, it may play in selected locations where local audiences are known to favour such titles before potentially touring more widely in subsequent weeks. Very exceptionally, a film may be 'platformed' in a single location before rolling out. Most films are released in the UK on fewer than 100 prints.

London, with an increasingly diverse population of 12.4m people, accounts for about a quarter of UK cinema admissions.

The digital transformation

For many years, films were released in cinemas on 35mm celluloid prints – which whirred through projectors on reels. Today's industry standard is *digital* with no celluloid involved.

For a digital release, specially encoded media files containing the film are delivered to cinemas either on a hard drive or via a satellite link. These are called DCPs (Digital Cinema Prints). The DCP is ingested into a powerful server at the cinema and played out through a state-of-the-art digital projector.

Once the DCP is received at the cinema, the projectionist normally needs to ask the film's distributor for a Key Delivery Message (KDM), a security key encryption system. This will generally be formatted to reflect the agreement affecting that film, i.e. the screen/s it may play on, what time of day it may play (particularly important for preview screenings), and within which dates.

Digital images appear on screen in *pristine quality* and do not deteriorate over time – there is no wear and tear or scratches, as was inevitable with 35mm projection machinery. Digital *remastering*, though time-consuming and costly, enables classic films to return to the big screen looking as good as new.

Digital equipment enables cinemas to redefine themselves as modern entertainment centres, able to present sports, operas, live concerts, shows and other events to local communities. This means films must be scheduled in smarter, more flexible ways to reach their maximum potential audience

Digital projectors may be adapted easily to show content in 3D. 3D can enhance some films dramatically with a spectacular, laser-sharp viewing experience, and more and more films – live-action and animation – are released in 3D as well as 2D. As 3D films can command a ticket price premium, there is a potential for enhanced box-office returns. In 2012, 3D accounted for 18% of the total UK box-office.

Digital prints are significantly less expensive to duplicate than the old 35mm copies, and the hard drives can be reused. So wider releases, and the logistics of hard drives moving from cinema to cinema, become easier to manage.

However, there are currently other costs associated with digital prints, meaning that they are not quite as cheap an option as they might appear – notably **Virtual Print Fees** (VPFs).

VPFs are the most widely used method of financing the conversion of cinemas from 35mm to digital. The VPF is built on the premise that a digital copy of a film costs less to make than a 35mm print, so the saving is used to contribute to the costs of the digital cinema equipment. The VPF is paid by a distributor each time a film is booked into a cinema that has a conversion deal in place and continues until the cost of the digital installation is paid off (normally around 5–10 years). The costs involved are set out in confidential commercial contracts between the parties on a case by case basis.

By the spring of 2013, practically all of the 3,750 cinema screens in the UK had installed a digital projection system.

TAKE 4

HOW IS THE FILM GOING TO BE RELEASED?

As early as possible, the distributor views the finished film and confirms the release plan. UK distributors, who generally pay all the release costs including marketing and making prints, draw up a detailed budget covering both the *launch* and *sustaining* of the film post-release. The investment and projected returns can be reassessed subject to commercial performance week by week.

Budgets are estimated in advance. A **theatrical distribution budget** may be itemised as follows:

Cost category	£
FILM COSTS	
Film certification fee (payable to the BBFC)	
Digital cinema prints	
Digital Master cost	
No. digital prints in 2D and (if any) 3D	
Duplication cost	
Cost of encoding/encryption applications (including generating the KDM codes needed to 'unlock' the digital files in the cinema servers to enable the film to play)	

Digital trailer costs	
Transport to cinemas	
Virtual print fees [LINK]	
Other digital costs	
Other print costs (if any)	
No. and cost of IMAX® prints	
No. and cost of HFR ('higher frame rate') print costs	
Trailer print costs	
Transport to cinemas	
MARKETING COSTS	
Media (pre-launch, launch and sustain)	
Press/print advertising	
TV advertising	
Online advertising	
Outdoor advertising	
Radio advertising	
Social media profiles	
Other media costs	
Promotions	
Media promotion(s) – e.g. on-air/online/print	
Contribution to any licensed/retail partner or other promotion(s)	
Prize packages (holidays/trips/merchandise)	
Agencies and presentation costs	
Publicity	
Set visits (sending key journalists)	
Press screenings	
Talkers (i.e. advance public screenings), if any	
Premiere/Gala screening, if any	
Visiting talent costs: travel (airfares/cars), accommodation, per diems (expenses) and hospitality, junket venue hire	
Festival screenings/travel	
PR agency fees & expenses	
Press kits/online press office management	
Other publicity costs	
Campaign production	
Film poster design	
Poster printing	
Print advertising	
TV spots	
Online ads	
Radio spots	
Film trailer for cinemas and online/TV	

Subtitles/audio description tracks	
Content for UK film website(s)	
Foyer POS display items origination & print	
Promotional leaflets/flyers, if any	
Other production costs	
OTHER	
Research screening/exit polling, if any	
Additional materials (specify)	
Couriers, copying, incidental expenses	
Contingency	
Total	

Total UK distribution expenditure can vary from some thousands of pounds up to £4m–£5m per film. Worldwide, a film that cost \$100–200m to *produce* can cost a further \$100m+ to *release* – and all this is committed before any income materialises, so the stakes are high.

In co-ordinating all these campaign elements, often for several different releases at a time, distributors must exercise formidable project management skills. Whereas it's possible for a fine film to get lost in the *mêlée* without careful handling and distinct promotion, even inspired marketing can't save a film for which the public has no appetite.

SCENE 9

FILM MARKETING

EXT. THE OUTBACK. *The sun is baking the ground. Two horses and riders approach. A shimmer is visible in the foreground, tempting water, maybe...? One of the riders jumps down and starts to lead his horse towards it, but the horse is immediately strangely reluctant, pulling back on his reins, neighing loudly.*

The job of a distributor is to create visibility and to raise enough awareness and interest in a film to persuade potential audiences to buy tickets to go and see it at the nearest cinema at the earliest opportunity, eschewing all other entertainment options at the time. Ideally marketing needs to lead a horse to water and also persuade it to drink!

Marketing encompasses a number of core disciplines – creative/production, online and offline publicity or public relations (PR), digital/social media, advertising, promotions and events.

The marketing plan – produced to complement the overall distribution plan – is designed to navigate a route to market that allows interest to peak as the film opens in cinemas. This will take into account the competitive environment, to ensure that the opportunities to raise interest and awareness are not lost under the weight of other films or entertainment on release.

TAKE 1

FILM ARTWORK

Falling under the auspices of the creative/production teams, the main image or artwork distills the *appeal* and *positioning* of the film – its stars, genre, credits and often a tagline to whet audiences' appetites.

With probably a dozen or more different posters on display in a cinema at any one time, distributors and their designers must work hard to make each one stand out. Even more importantly, these images are put online the moment they are available, becoming common currency for the film across all kinds of online media from a very early stage.

Film posters may be created by the studio or sales agent as applicable and rolled out internationally or adapted for use locally. Alternatively, they may be devised in the UK from scratch, depending on what approved materials are available and how the film is best positioned for local audiences.

A poster is produced for every release, in quad format (the traditional UK size of 30" x 40", landscape orientation) or one-sheet format (the US equivalent with similar dimensions, portrait orientation).

Many months before release, a website and an initial teaser poster may be created to announce that a film is coming. Such materials are early building blocks, generally including phrases such as 'Coming soon', 'From the makers of....' or some other kind of tagline.

Distributors provide display materials for cinema foyers. Freestanding cardboard or special 'standees', bunting, banners, window clings, floor stickers and mini-posters/activity sheets are among some of the items produced, tailored for both the larger multiplex or the smaller independent. These displays help consumers in the cinema to make their final choice of which film to see, whilst also sparking consideration of their next visits. As much of this material as possible is recycled after use.

Occasionally – and in particular when films are enjoying strong word of mouth – 'quotes posters' are produced and disseminated to cinemas. These highlight a selection of glowing comments by critics or bloggers, similar to ads made for the press or online. Any and every additional endorsement is important to help motivate the largest possible audience to come along.

TAKE 2

TRAILERS

The strongest asset, and probably the single most cost-effective marketing technique, available to a film distributor is a good trailer. It forms the foundation of many additional assets, including TV and online spots and other promotional audio-visual material.

Trailers play both on the big screen to a captive audience of active cinemagoers and also online/mobile where they generally appear first. In nearly all **exit poll** research, trailers emerge as the main source of information about a film.

Main trailers, screened closer to a film launch, may be preceded by early teasers (typically up to 90 seconds). Specialist agencies or production companies are briefed by local distributors to create a trailer from the available material, which may be everything from the entire film to a few approved clips. Naturally, in aiming to sell the film, they want to include a representative glimpse of the most dramatic sequences but, early in the production, the editing and special effects will not be finished. Trailer making is a filmmaking art in its own right.

Trailers are carefully edited to the appropriate classification to secure the maximum play time in cinemas. It's possible to cut a trailer for a 12A rated movie that might play before a U or PG feature film, as long as the trailer itself is rated no higher than that film. This is important because sometimes there may not be enough higher rated fare before your film is released with which you can schedule a trailer. But there might be a couple of big animated blockbusters which will deliver audiences of adults and teenagers as well as younger family groups.

Exhibitors, who programme their own screens, select trailers appropriate to the feature film before which they're played. Distributors provide the trailers via DCPs. Trailers rated U or PG may also play on their digital foyer screens, where they exist. Sometimes trailers for new theatrical releases are added to the front of compatibly targeted DVDs too.

Exit polls are generally conducted as people are leaving a paid screening of the film, usually over the opening weekend of the release. To give a fair representation, exit polls tend to be conducted across at least two different, representative locations and at different times of day.

Audiences are asked questions about how they rated the movie (excellent, good, fair, poor); whether they would recommend it to their friends (definitely, maybe); what media or promotions they had seen; which of them had most informed their decision to come to the cinema to watch the film; and whether they would subsequently buy the DVD/digital download.

TAKE 3

DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing may be undertaken as part of each discipline in the department, or it may be handled by a department of its own. However it is organised, 'digital' is an integral part of every area of activity, from the production and management of a website and the implementation of viral campaigns, to the setting up and on-going 'feeding' of the social network presence for the film and/or the distribution company itself. Someone in the marketing team will be responsible for the working relationships with key Internet Service Providers (ISPs) or other major online sites with whom the distributor might have a tie-in, with their own microsite pages complementing the film's editorial coverage, trailer breaks and other advertising.

To further increase engagement, distributors supply online advertising for websites, and commission apps and games that can work across social and mobile platforms in support of the film.

TAKE 4

PUBLICITY

The scope of the Publicity role has grown enormously in the past few years. Today it encompasses so much more than securing a front cover on a stylish magazine for one of a film's stars or the lead review in a broadsheet. Film publicists need to think of the impact of *all* available media, most specifically *online*, where everything is instantly available.

Assessments of the 'PR-ability' of a film start in the very early days of its production. A good unit publicist will probably invite journalists on to the set as it's being shot.

The earlier that pre-disposed consumers are aware that 'something is coming', however far off, the better. Fans devouring film-focused magazines or their online editions like and *expect* to be informed what is shooting for release a year or more in the future.

Often that early interest can broaden beyond film buffs. For example, Brad Pitt running around fighting zombies on a location in Cornwall in 2011 created a great deal of publicity in the national press for *World War Z* (Paramount) yet the completed film was released only in 2013. International productions being shot here in the UK can add significantly to the early awareness of their forthcoming release.

The distributor's publicity department or PR agency will review what material was created on set – or, if the shoot is still in progress, they may add more requests for production visits, including

journalists, exhibitors and promotional partners. Film sets are normally strictly closed to the public, so the opportunity is highly sought after.

Film publicists compile press kits for journalists, containing cast and crew lists, biographies, notable facts about the production and a synopsis. It's very important to have a selection of fine images from the film approved for publicity use, taken by a unit photographer. Sometimes these are supplemented with 'special shoots', where the cast are generally photographed specifically for the film though not necessarily in costume. All these materials are disseminated via online pressrooms, and distributors pro-actively devise 'hooks' or 'angles' for feature articles and media promotions. A film's theme may take on a life of its own within the news media.

The publicity team, frequently supported by specialist agencies, arranges media interviews with available members of the film's cast, and chaperones artists visiting the UK for junkets (talent interviews), press conferences or premieres. Many digital channels and outlets are interested in entertainment news and features – the more the film's talent is willing and able to support the UK or worldwide publicity effort, the better!

Other media stunts might be held, even without the talent, and probably in advance of any screenings, just to build the hype towards a release.

This activity, for instance, for *Star Trek: Into Darkness* tied in with WWF Earth Hour.

Once the completed film is delivered, it's then down to the Publicity department to ensure that the appropriate journalists, bloggers and critics see it at just the right time pre-release. Screenings for national critics (print/online publications) are normally held on the Friday, Monday and Tuesday before a film opens to the public; those for journalists with longer lead-times are scheduled further in advance.

Although positive reviews are no guarantee of commercial success, critics' plaudits can still be important in helping to distinguish and champion certain films, and extracts of their reviews are often included in advertising.

The timing of early screenings, particularly for 'day and date' releases (i.e. films which open at the same time in the US and Internationally), is critical. Reviews are normally embargoed until the week of release and attendees are often discouraged from blogging on social networks until an embargo date is passed so that a domestic release is not undermined by poor international reviews or vice-versa.

However, it's also the case that films can live or die *online* among certain audiences. The distributor needs to be confident, therefore, that such a film will find favour and that online reviews and comments will help create positive buzz. This can be one of the strongest assets in a distributor's armoury to aid the release.

Awards

The build-up to the major awards is an important time for publicists promoting the films vying for consideration.

The season of mounting speculation lasts up to *five months* before the BAFTAs and Academy Awards (Oscars®). Costly trade campaigns unfold to secure voters' attention to particular titles, performances and craft contributions. Shortlists of nominations are announced three or four weeks before the presentation ceremonies, which deliver global profile and prestige. The nominations and wins for any awards are often used in promoting the movies to film-goers via advertising or publicity.

In the UK, the BAFTAs are the focus of much activity. Films likely to be in contention are usually released between September and mid-February, and plenty of screenings and Q&A sessions are scheduled for voting members.

A 'Best Film' accolade in particular can rejuvenate a film's box-office takings and extend its shelf-life. If it were no longer on screens at that time, it may even be re-released to capitalise on the prestige. Here, a winning *British* film can do especially well on the back of awards triumphs.

Festivals

Subject to their release date, films vying for awards consideration are often featured one of the major film festivals.

In the UK, the two biggest are the London Film Festival (October/November) and Edinburgh (June). In Ireland, the Dublin Film Festival takes place in February.

London tends to support a wide variety of films from documentaries to major features. Once a film is accepted into the event (it must be a UK 'premiere'), the organisation of talent (cast, director, crew) begins. Their presence at the festival will often inform the timing of a junket and the film's premiere is part of the festival programme.

Premieres

Perceived as glamorous and exclusive, but painstaking and expensive to organise, premieres generally take place one or two weeks in advance of the release. They form the culmination of all the publicity and promotional work to date.

Specialist agencies often work with the distributor's publicity team to organise the event, ensuring a strong platform is provided for photo opportunities and red carpet interviews. Star-studded premieres and after-show parties are covered by celebrity publications and news media, and often transmitted worldwide.

A gala screening in aid of charity can raise a substantial sum via ticket sales and donations. But from the distributor's professional perspective the main goal of a premiere is to give the film a high-profile, entertaining launch, boosting the all-important *buzz* factor. Some TV companies present red-carpet specials dedicated to a big premiere.

Most premieres in the UK – 50 or more a year – take place in London’s Leicester Square, which, with its four big cinemas (and even more screens) gives ample scope for premieres of all scales. The Square’s gardens are often integrated into the theming of the event. Some exceptional events are arranged at venues outside of Leicester Square, such as the Royal Albert Hall or Festival Hall, when even more seats are required in one location.



Credit: Sony

TAKE 5

PROMOTIONS

Promotional activity can comprise several areas: licensing and merchandising, third-party brand promotions, media and exhibitor promotions, screening programmes, and more. Let’s explore each category in turn.

Licensing and Merchandising

Many releases, particularly family films, have merchandising programmes co-ordinated by specialist licensing agencies or occasionally, from the studio itself. Manufacturers may be licensed to use approved logo devices, symbols, images or character likenesses on specific products, normally in exchange for an advance fee set against subsequent royalty payments. Sometimes, licensing fees may be waived if the brand undertakes significant levels of advertising in support of the film’s release or sustaining campaign.

Licensed merchandise, on sale to the public in stores and online, helps to enhance the film’s profile. Ranges may include action figures, ringtones, clothing, stationery, food, calendars, *anything*. Films regularly have official soundtracks, games and books, which can generate significant revenues in their own right.

The distributor’s promotions team, or their agency, will work alongside the licensed partners – and must avoid dealing with any companies who might be regarded as competitive in the field. As free giveaways for media prizes or experiential events, distributors often commission film promotional merchandise such as T-shirts, watches, bags, pens, inflatables and skateboards, or they may arrange themed holidays to the film’s location. Distributors may be obliged to source prize items from official licensees rather than other suppliers (who may be cheaper!).

Third-party and brand promotions

The next tier comprises promotional partnerships that are approved but don't necessarily carry a licence (as above). They may be a one-off promotion with a food, drink or confectionery brand, an electronics or clothing retailer, or a mobile phone or coffee shop chain. Again, such promotions are designed to deliver additional exposure on high streets and online, so that audiences are reminded of the film in places they don't expect.

Given the lead times involved, these promotions are frequently arranged up to a year in advance of the film's release. The timing of the brand's advertising and in-store activity needs precisely to match the distributor's plans for the launch of the film.

Media promotions

These are promotions instigated with online, TV, radio or print partners to generate further exposure and interest in the upcoming film.

Most broadcast partners expect payment (or additional advertising) in return for a promotion, but it can be an invaluable investment. A DJ giving several reads an hour over a few days for listeners to enter a phone-in competition can create more impact in audiences' minds than a 30-second commercial. Media partners also expect to be allocated significant prizes such as holidays, electronics equipment or 'money-can't-buy' tickets to a premiere or private screening.

It's possible to set up media promotions at short notice. This makes them more flexible for films whose release date might change at the (relatively) last minute.

Exhibitor promotions

Exhibitors (cinema operators) are not only distributors' trade customers, screening dozens of releases each month, but also very important promotional partners.

Exhibitors' websites, which attract large cinemagoing audiences, can be powerful promotional platforms for a highlighted film. Given so many competing releases at any one time, a strong prize promotion with an exhibitor can help to distinguish a particular film and boost its visibility online for a day, which can be a cost-effective use of the distributor's budget.

Preview screenings

The personal recommendation of a friend or relative or online community ranks alongside trailers and TV spots for stimulating positive interest and cinema visits for a specific film. Anyone with a smart phone or computer, who is on a social network, is potentially an influential advocate, critic or detractor.

The opportunity to screen a film to certain target audiences around the country (not journalists) is an important consideration within the overall screenings strategy. Audiences are recruited by age, demographic or interest group, and offered the opportunity to attend an early screening. Then

they are asked to fill in questionnaires to give feedback to the distributors, and they are encouraged to blog about their enjoyment of the film.

Nearer release, tickets to see the film early may be offered to readers of a particular print/online publication, or listeners of a radio programme, matching the film's core audience; or they may be offered as prizes via a brand partner.

Negative word of mouth can be extremely difficult to overcome, so distributors only tend to run 'word of mouth' screenings when they are very confident that the buzz will be positive.

Educational resources

Certain films can provide excellent collateral to help teachers bring specific subjects to life in schools. Period films, historical epics, Shakespearean adaptations, modern-day dramas, even science fiction stories can find legitimate, useful outlets within school curricula. English, Drama, Media Studies, Citizenship, History, Foreign Languages, Science and RE have all had film material tailored to teachers' needs.

TAKE 5

MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

A film's advertising campaign might be the last part of the marketing programme to be put in place, but it is likely to have been planned very early on.

Not unlike buying airline seats, the earlier you buy, the cheaper your media is likely to be. Media advertising is likely to account for the greatest proportion of a film's release budget, probably upwards of 70%.

In 2012, UK film distributors invested about £184m a year in media advertising alone to launch and sustain their releases. TV and Outdoor accounted for more than 80% of expenditure. Overall, the Entertainment and Telecoms industries are the biggest Outdoor advertisers. Internet advertising is the fastest growing area of expenditure, although still a difficult one to measure accurately.

In broad terms, media advertising campaigns are constructed using the concepts of *paid*, *owned* and *earned* channels.

Paid is bought advertising (e.g. TV spots, posters, ad space online).

Owned is maximising the distributor's own channels – their websites, film microsites, social media sites. These channels are promoted through search engine optimisation (SEO) and on-site advertising promotions.

Earned comprises editorial coverage and social network content such as blogs, videos, tweets and images designed to draw in film fans.

Once the film's marketing budget has been determined, the media component can be worked out. *This* budget is then discussed with the appointed media planning/buying agency, who will devise the best advertising plan to achieve the desired result.

Media proliferation and fragmentation have given all advertisers a multitude of options. For example, the UK has approximately 250,000 poster sites by roadsides or railway platforms, thousands of newspapers and radio stations (each with their own websites), and hundreds of digital TV channels where advertising and promotions may be placed.

Television and outdoor can deliver *ubiquity* – relatively high coverage and frequency – to films and brands that advertise on them, but UK media costs are high. There are also massive opportunities for online advertising with the ability to target audiences extremely precisely.

Terrestrial television is traditionally the most effective visual means of reaching a mass audience. But TV advertising costs, running into many hundreds of thousands of pounds or more for a package of spots in all regions, is prohibitive for most film releases given their potential returns.

If terrestrial TV is not an option, multi-channel household (MCH) channels offer opportunities to reach more niche audiences. But the production and provision of the TV commercials is still an expense to factor into the mix, particularly given the need for multiple versions – i.e. one ending 'Coming soon'; another with the date of release; possibly another flagging 'previews this weekend' or 'on Weds/Thurs'; and then a version stating 'in cinemas now'.

Event films/blockbusters with top stars generally need heavy advertising spends to support their wide releases. But with limited budgets for any release, distributors try to work up fresh, inventive ways to target specific audiences. TV viewers often fast-forward through advertising that doesn't quickly engage their interest.

When planning their advertising schedules, distributors must bear in mind that different audiences react to advertising, and reach their decision to see a film, in different ways. Older audiences may respond best having seen the film advertised in the press or on TV, with credentials and quotes, while for younger audiences it's more appropriate to promote online and on radio stations or bus panels.

As more and more people watch TV whilst surfing, tweeting and engaging with other social media, multi-campaign engagement can be highly effective but it demands an extremely co-ordinated approach. For instance, a spot in a reality show live final could be complemented by a series of tweets or a Facebook commentary running during the broadcast to promote a relevant film. A performance during the show by a star who might be in a forthcoming film could also provide inescapable coverage.

RESEARCH AND TRACKING

Research is an extremely valuable tool for distributors. A *research screening* can help to identify or clarify what elements of a film are the most entertaining; which characters or actors the most motivating; which settings the most appealing; and which audience would be most engaged. This can inform everything from the production of trailers, TV spots and clips to the film's artwork, website and apps.

The second part of the research equation is *tracking*. At the point of campaigns breaking (starting to appear), usually up to eight weeks before release, distributors may receive weekly 'tracking'. This is the results of a telephone survey conducted among 2,000 cinemagoers each week, with the data generally split into quadrants, under and over 25 years of age, by gender.

The films in the two charts below were released at various points during 2007–2012. They are all examples of well-received British films and the data indicate where they stood on their respective release weekends.

Unaided awareness reflects audience responses to a question such as 'What films are you aware of about to open in cinemas?'

Aided awareness provides the interviewee with a list of films opening soon, so this sort of questioning tends to yield higher figures than *Unaided* research.

Opening this week	Total	M<25	M25+	F<25	F25+
<i>Unaided awareness</i>					
SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN	3%	1%	4%	3%	4%
ATONEMENT	8%	3%	7%	13%	11%
MADE IN DAGENHAM	3%	1%	1%	4%	4%
MY WEEK WITH MARILYN	2%	0%	1%	3%	3%
THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL	3%	2%	1%	3%	5%
<i>Total awareness</i>					
SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN	34%	23%	36%	31%	46%
ATONEMENT	45%	29%	49%	46%	56%
MADE IN DAGENHAM	38%	22%	46%	36%	46%
MY WEEK WITH MARILYN	31%	23%	26%	39%	38%
THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL	37%	27%	35%	33%	52%

The next criteria is *Definite Interest*, established from those with aided awareness, i.e. How interested are you in going to see *this* film when it opens?' Then there's *First choice* preference among 'yet to be released' and 'opening and released' films.

All the findings are set against established 'norms', which allows the research companies, with their databases of thousands of films, to assess the likely box-office success or failure of any upcoming film. The number of prints is also taken into account – it would be unsurprising to find low awareness or interest for a release opening on only 100 screens, where the budget might be relatively small. It would be desperately disappointing, however, to find a highly expensive production with a hefty marketing budget reporting high awareness but very low interest or first choice selection.

Opening this week	Total	M<25	M25+	F<25	F25+
<i>Def. Int. amongst aware</i>					
SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN	23%	23%	20%	22%	26%
ATONEMENT	27%	9%	24%	31%	34%
MADE IN DAGENHAM	26%	16%	22%	24%	35%
MY WEEK WITH MARILYN	23%	6%	15%	28%	33%
THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL	34%	29%	42%	27%	35%
<i>1st Choice among open & released</i>					
SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN	7%	2%	9%	3%	13%
ATONEMENT	7%	1%	6%	8%	13%
MADE IN DAGENHAM	12%	6%	20%	7%	14%
MY WEEK WITH MARILYN	7%	2%	4%	9%	11%
THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL	10%	5%	11%	5%	18%

Whereas there is little you can do with the information on the week of opening (except, perhaps, throw more money into last minute advertising), understanding three weeks ahead that fewer younger women are definitely interested in *'And Then What?'* than younger men might give pause for thought. A reassessment of the media choices being used, or a review of other media, promotions or publicity yet to break, could be a valuable exercise.

MARKETING STRATEGY: *'And Then What?'*

'And Then What?' is a romantic comedy with a 15 certificate. It has two strong British stars as the main protagonists, who are not top 'marquee' names but are recognisable. There are several well-known TV and film character actors in supporting roles. The film producers had secured its UK distributor before it went to the international markets, and the distributor has dated its release to coincide with Valentine's Day. It is predominantly targeting 20-40 year-old women, but men will go on a 'date night'.

There is only one trailer for this film. It was produced four months before release, a little later than optimal, but there were issues in cutting it to be a 12A to enable it to play with a big romantic drama being released in October, and of course, it could be screened with some of the big movies being released. The delay meant that the official website lacked some really strong content for a while. The trailer, on delivery, got an exclusive play on a celebrity-focused news website, and got some major hits before it went into cinemas. It was tweeted and posted up on the film's social networking page.

The film is funny. It will have an advance screenings programme as word of mouth is expected to be strong. A top celebrity-focused magazine is keen to run special screenings and will provide some major coverage as well as promotion of the previews. On top of that, the distributor is recruiting nurses, hairdressers and other groups to come and watch the film before release so they can tweet or comment on it and encourage their friends to come too.

The Publicity department has scheduled a 'multi-media' screening for journalists, where all disciplines (magazines, online, radio and TV critics) plus other industry colleagues, are encouraged to see the film. They have also offered some refreshments beforehand: comedies screen best to full auditoria and an engaged audience.

There is a good website for the film, with a fun quiz that can be shared on social media. The website will be promoted early on with key search words; advertising will be placed on other female-orientated websites; and a Home Page Takeover has been negotiated to run a few days before release with a major ISP.

There is a reasonable budget for the film, which means that shows like *Hollyoaks*, *The Simpsons* and Sunday night dramas can be used in a TV campaign, using 20- and 30-second spots. In addition, the MCH channels offer various female lifestyle channels providing the perfect environment for the message. The media agency can buy two weeks of TV. They have also negotiated a good deal for a bus-side campaign to run in cities around the UK and Ireland for two weeks before release.

There is minimal expenditure on magazine advertisings – just one insertion in a train station weekly giveaway and another in a free morning paper.

The distributor has negotiated a great promotion on a national radio station, with a chance for three couples to win a romantic holiday for two to a spa hotel in Paris, and other 'romantic' prizes.

There is some budget for a one-off stunt – to turn the London Eye into a giant heart for one night, just before release. It's going to be the same night as the film's premiere in Leicester Square. This is co-ordinated with the Publicity department to ensure that a photocall is conducted just before arrivals on the red carpet, and the images are provided to all online and offline media as well as being posted on the film's own social media networks and website.

The stunt is well-covered, too, by the passing public on their own social networks. The premiere coverage and the London Eye stunt together provide a lot of 'noise' and comment for the film with Paid, Owned and Earned media working in tandem. The distributor negotiated a couple of sponsors for the premiere, helping to offset some of the costs.

The interviews conducted at the junket on the day of the premiere will run over the next couple of days. One of the main cast also appeared on a national TV chat show the weekend prior.

The distributor has been following the success of the campaign by monitoring the 'buzz' online and by a formal mechanism – the tracking.

They have noted a recent strong lift in awareness, both aided and unaided, and steady growth in definite interest, particularly among their core target audience. Gratifyingly, in the week before

release, the film is now 'first choice' among women over 25, and second choice for all male groups. This means that the distributor can be reasonably confident that the film will open with relatively strong box-office receipts.

Now there is little more they can do as the campaign is reaching its peak. It's now up to the general public to decide whether or not to go to the cinema and see the film.

SCENE 10

LICENSING FILMS TO EXHIBITORS

A key consideration in any distribution plan is *where* the film should play. *Which sorts of cinemas and screens are most appropriate? Given the intended audience, how can the theatrical release achieve its greatest impact? How many screens and prints are likely to be sustainable?*

Every theatrical release is effectively a joint-venture: the distributor supplies the film, the exhibitors provide the screens, and the arrangements are reviewed week by week. Like all retailers, cinema operators must be persuaded to 'stock the product'. Distributors screen their forthcoming titles for cinema bookers, and discuss release dates and marketing campaigns.

The distributor's sales and marketing strategies go hand in glove, with the film's target audience kept front of mind. For each release, the sales team negotiates a confidential license agreement bilaterally with each exhibitor interested in playing the film. Under English law, the maximum booking period for a new release is two weeks, after which, by mutual agreement, the film may continue to play for a week at a time if it is drawing a significant audience.

Many cinemas aim to show a broad spectrum of titles. Others may specialise in particular kinds of film according to their catchment area. Potential blockbusters tend to be booked into every available multiplex simultaneously, while for smaller releases, particular screens are likely to be identified and the release nurtured carefully week after week.

TAKE 1

PRINT MANAGEMENT

Print or technical management is both creative and logistical. With responsibility generally for everything from liaison with the BBFC for classification of both features and trailers, to discussion with filmmakers or studios regarding delivery of master materials, and to logistical delivery of the film to several hundred cinemas in multiple formats, the role demands great attention to detail.

A hard drive (DCP) is despatched by the technical department to each cinema that has booked the film, where the data is ingested into a server connected to a digital projector. (These digital machines are completely different from the 35mm projectors which they have largely replaced.) The screen's content for each playweek can be loaded in advance to run at pre-programmed times.

A different procedure applies where IMAX® (large-format) prints are needed or where 35mm capacity is retained. These celluloid prints are delivered broken down into reels contained in sealed cans. On arrival at the cinema a few days before first playdate, the reels are physically joined together and laced on to the projectors.

Security protocols adopted across the industry ensure that film prints are kept safe throughout the theatrical run. After use, the hard drives are returned and reused. Most celluloid prints are

destroyed under supervised conditions with as much material as possible recycled. A copy is usually archived for future generations.

Accessible cinema

Hundreds of films are released each year with digital subtitles and audio description. New titles are made available to cinemas every week as a service to cinemagoers with less than perfect sight or hearing. Some film trailers are presented online in accessible formats too. It is the role of the Print Management department to handle production of the accessible prints too. The positioning of subtitles, in particular, can be an area of much discussion with the director or other filmmakers concerned.

Whenever you see these symbols on a film advertisement, you'll know that subtitles and audio description tracks have been produced for its release: **ST + AD** where available.

For current information, please visit www.yourlocalcinema.com.

TAKE 2

ONE SHOT

A film can only be launched once. Its first weekend in cinemas is crucial to further progress, because if it is deemed to have opened 'below par', it's very likely to lose screens or be switched to screens with a smaller capacity very quickly.

The distributor's marketing effort builds up to the opening weekend, which normally draws by far the largest audience of any weekend in the theatrical run. It's quite common for a film to generate 30% or more of its entire box-office during the first three days of release. Although films conventionally start in UK cinemas on Fridays, distributors quite often open on other days or run previews the weekend before.

Around 60% of cinema visits take place over the weekend (Friday–Sunday), with the other four weekdays accounting for 9–12% each. Monday is traditionally the least busy day. Courtesy of Rentrak, you can keep track of the top films at the UK box-office each week via FDA's website, www.launchingfilms.com, and elsewhere.

Distribution plans usually assume that the revenues and number of screens on which a film plays will decline, often rapidly, as competing titles are launched in successive weeks. But such plans are necessarily flexible: better than expected grosses may lead to a quick investment in some extra advertising and the film may be scheduled into *more* screens than on its opening weekend. A highly impressive opening frame can become a news story in its own right.

TAKE 3

BOX OFFICE RETURNS

Since every film is its creators' intellectual property, the prints are rented to, or hired under license by, the exhibitors, rather than being sold outright as with most packaged or manufactured goods.

Exhibitors, who tend to use computerised box-office/ticketing systems, submit a weekly return for each title, indicating to its distributor how many tickets were sold and at what price. Cinema ticket prices are always set by the individual exhibitor.

Box-office takings – i.e. the gross receipts including VAT – are often reported in the press. But the sums that distributors actually earn are substantially *less* than these figures. Revenue from ticket sales is normally *shared* between the distributor and exhibitor. The percentage each party takes varies film by film and week by week. Generally, UK distributors receive 25–40% of the gross. So, if a film grosses £5m in cinemas, its distributor may eventually collect around £1.5m, allowing for the deduction of VAT which exhibitors must pay for each ticket sold. This net share was traditionally known as the distributor's 'rentals'.

Out of the net share, the distributor aims to recoup any minimum guarantee plus the P&A costs incurred in releasing the film. Any outstanding balance is then shared with the producers according to a pre-agreed formula set out in the distribution contract. Alternatively, the distributor may simply retain a distribution fee, with all net proceeds remitted to the producers.

Distributors' businesses depend on the income they receive from licensing content. Distributors do not participate in exhibitors' revenues from advance booking fees or the drinks, confectionery and popcorn sold in cinema bars and foyers, or in any proceeds from screen advertising.

TAKE 4

THE HOLD-OVER CHALLENGE

Computerised till systems enable the ticket sales and advance bookings for any film to be tracked hour by hour. On Monday morning, with the weekend's box-office takings collated, the distributor's sales team discusses with each exhibitor the hold-over of current releases for a further week from Friday (four days later).

A vital fixture in the working week, these bilateral negotiations take into account:

- all the new releases coming into the market
- any previews planned for the coming weekend, intensifying the competition for the available screens
- the screen average (the average box-office gross receipts per screen) of every film on current release, with only those ranked at or near the top likely to retain screens

Sustaining a release week by week, and keeping it in a screen with appropriate capacity, is a key challenge in such a fast-churning market place. As previously mentioned, competition comes from many quarters – sports tournaments, games launches, other events. Royal births inevitably provide fierce competition for media coverage, too! Films can be *years* in the planning and production phases, and then barely a few weeks in cinemas.

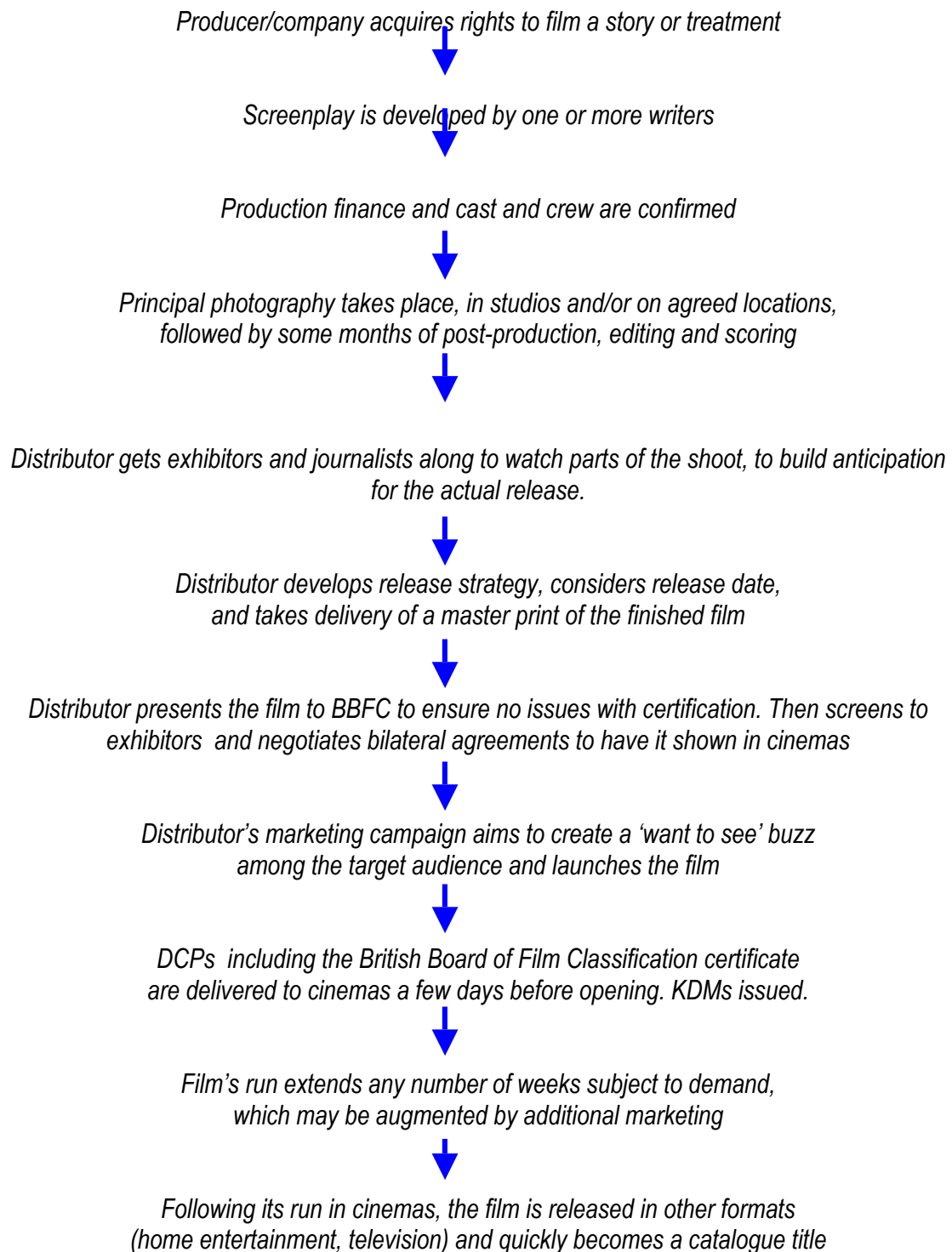
Natural disasters and tragedies cannot always be avoided, and there have been rare occasions when distributors have had to withdraw films from release because of a potential perceived lack of sensitivity in the light of a major disaster, local or global.

The **weather** can also be a factor: Very hot temperatures which entice people outdoors, or extreme winter conditions with the opposite effect, will affect any title's commercial destiny from day to day. As 'leisure experience' venues, cinemas compete with restaurants, wine bars, clubs and shopping malls – as well as entertainment options in the home. Cinemas are only as strong as the content they offer and the environment in which it is consumed.

EPILOGUE

Team effort

Creative, commercial and professional skills are needed in all branches of the film industry, including distribution. This chart outlines the overall lifecycle of a film like 'And Then What?':



And Then What? is released in the UK around Valentine's Day on 400 prints across multiplexes and some independents. It debuts at no.3 in the box-office chart, a great result for this British romcom with an average box-office per screen – the measure by which a film's success can be gauged – of £3,600.

It was beaten only by a kids animated movie running previews early for half-term, and by a big-hitting, male-oriented Oscar-winner. All of which are targeting broadly different target groups (though with some cross-over between older female audiences, torn between the kids and their own enjoyment), but mostly they have each found their audiences successfully.

Holdovers for *And Then What?* will be negotiated readily based on its successful start, good reviews, and strong word-of-mouth. Exit polls, taken in Manchester and Croydon, indicate that the core audience was predominantly female (70%), 25–45 years old, indicating many going in girlfriend groups; but obviously a good number of males too, possibly dragged along on dates, equally reflecting an older, 30–45 year old bias. 'Definite Recommend' scores were high from both genders, but highest from women over 25.

The distributor decides to spend more marketing money behind it on radio and online to support the success and to maintain its momentum for a week or two longer.

SEQUEL:

THE WIDER PICTURE

The film industry has never been one to stand still. Over the last century, new media technologies have successively opened up fresh ways to make, share and market films. The UK remains an important hub for both film production and consumption, accounting for approximately 7% of *global* cinema box-office receipts and 20% of European box-office. Cinemagoing as a form of quality escapist entertainment has proven to be resilient during times of economic downturn.

Many films secure their production finance from more than one source. The US studios may share the costs of a big production or split the distribution rights between, say, the US/Canada (domestic) and the rest of the world (international). Some films are licensed piecemeal, territory by territory; others are handled by the same company via a network of offices worldwide. For local distributors, dubbing or subtitling may be an additional release cost.

Accelerating distribution patterns

Traditionally, films would open first in US cinemas, then roll out gradually in other countries. It's now common for films to earn far more internationally than domestically, another trend that will endure. China now has the largest cinema box-office outside the US, with much more development potential ahead.

In today's digital world, in an effort to capitalise on global publicity and combat piracy, more and more films open practically 'day and date' (simultaneously) in many parts of the world. With master prints arriving in each country ever closer to launch date, such releases represent huge logistical and technical exercises for their distributors.

Economic multiplier effects

With box-office ticket sales currently worth more than £1 billion a year, the UK remains one of the world's most valuable cinema markets. When you factor in the extra spending during a cinema visit on food, drink, travel and other items, the theatrical market alone pumps over £3 billion a year into the UK economy.

The performance of British films here in their local market can have a significant influence on the attention they receive and their commercial prospects overseas. Nevertheless, releases that perform well in one country's cinemas will not necessarily do well in all countries, and may need to be positioned and marketed differently. Distributors' expert knowledge of local tastes, cultural sensitivities and market conditions guides a film through its openings around the world.

Cinema release boosts subsequent prospects

Although most films *don't* recover their production and launch costs from the theatrical release alone, there are other opportunities in the business model. In fact, the cinema box-office constitutes a minority of overall filmed entertainment revenues.

With a title's profile and stature established, significant and much needed income may be derived from the release for home/mobile entertainment. DVD and Blu-Ray discs remain the favourite formats for home viewing but there is more and more inter-operability between formats. Indeed, further big shifts in home film consumption patterns are anticipated as the increased uptake of 'smart' (internet-enabled) televisions and various on-demand services (e.g. Blinkbox, Youview, Netflix) opens up the potential for direct online delivery of films to TVs and other tablet or mobile devices. The rise in on-demand streaming and downloading goes hand-in-glove with a reduction in viewing on physical media (discs).

The third slice of the film revenue pie is television. It is important to distributors that pay-TV and free-to-air channels acquire a broad range of films and that the public's widespread interest in the world of film – along with other leisure pursuits – is reflected in TV programmes. Across *all* forms of media, UK citizens each watch an average of seven films per month (source: BFI).

Older films can deliver strong ratings on television when scheduled to coincide with the cinema release of a new sequel. Some films, especially in the action or horror genres, may perform better, relatively, in the home entertainment arena than in cinemas.

Notwithstanding the haemorrhage from film theft (see below), cinemagoing has been positively affected by digital media formats. Most films that succeed theatrically go on to do well throughout their release cycle – the relationship is symbiotic; the audiences complementary.

Intellectual property theft

So-called 'film piracy' – but actually just a form of theft – is of great concern to people employed in the entertainment industry.

Although it's sometimes difficult to see, especially when transacted via computers, piracy feeds organised crime networks to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds a year. It also cheats people of the full viewing experience and can reduce local jobs and future investment. Without revenues via distribution, further films simply can't be made.

Distributors take steps to protect the security and integrity of the properties they are releasing. It's a criminal offence to record a film from the cinema screen onto a mobile phone or other device – and rightly so – how would you feel if it was *your* work being copied and exploited for criminal gain without your permission? But films remain especially vulnerable to illegal copying during the early or pre-release stages of their existence, and pirated copies may be disseminated very quickly via file-sharing websites and on DVD.

Discover more at www.copyrightaware.co.uk, www.fact-uk.org.uk and www.allianceagainstiptheft.co.uk.

You can also report film piracy anonymously at any time. Call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or visit www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Peruse the many ways in which films are legally available today at www.findanyfilm.com and elsewhere.

WORKING IN FILM DISTRIBUTION

A challenging career releasing films in a fast-moving market place – how does that grab you?

The film distribution sector is small, considering the scale, profile and influence of its output. Fewer than 500 people work in UK theatrical distribution – about 1% of the film/cinema industry's total workforce – although people working at media, PR and design agencies collaborate closely on the planning and execution of their clients' film campaigns.

A distributor's managing director normally supervises a small staff with specialist roles:

- Marketing (Publicity, Promotions, Advertising/Content, Media, Digital, Events)
- Sales
- Technical
- Acquisitions
- Administration
- Finance & accounting
- Legal & business affairs

In some ways, these departments function similarly to their demand-side counterparts in any industry, seeking to work as *sustainably* and *efficiently* as possible. But for film distributors, the products they handle are among the most thrillingly creative, emotionally charged, technologically advanced and hotly anticipated anywhere!

Diversity – fundamentally good for business

The UK today is made up of many communities. It's not just desirable, it's essential, for film distributors to stay in tune with audiences' tastes and wider culture and society, and to appreciate people's differences as well as their similarities. Distributors strive to recruit from as wide a talent pool as practical so that their companies remain competitive in the future. As opportunities arise, considering suitable candidates with various perspectives and backgrounds helps distributors to remain lively hubs of contemporary ideas.

Sharpen your skills

Distributors' offices often contain stacks of film scripts. Each one is read carefully, either because the project is being considered for acquisition or because the film is already in production and a release campaign is being prepared. Being able to appreciate and evaluate a script is an important skill – **read widely** among different writers and genres to get into practice!

Good experience for a film industry **marketing** position may be gained at an digital, advertising or media planning agency, especially by working with a film or entertainment client, or by project-managing in another area of intellectual property. As a marketing team member, you'd be expected to be alert to opportunities and to justify your ideas to colleagues and those involved in the film's production. Lots of ideas and sound judgement are called for when developing both the creative and media elements of a film campaign, and decisions are carefully evaluated.

If you're into **design**, why not consider movie posters, an art form in themselves. But you're unlikely ever to have a completely free hand – depending on the film stars, there may be tight restrictions on what can and can't be done, and there is sure to be a list of mandatory elements such as credits to include in a particular order or style.

For **publicity**, prior experience as a journalist or press officer is useful, or you could have worked at an online or offline publicity agency. No two days are the same, but you should be able to write succinctly and imaginatively, and to remain level-headed under pressure. Knowledge of today's evolving media landscape is crucial, as are good professional relationships with journalists and TV producers. Sometimes distributors need specialist public relations or event management expertise to help arrange a premiere or a junket, and external agencies may be assigned to a particular project.

Sales staff, who deal with the licensing of films to exhibitors, use various strategies depending on the film and the agreed scale of its release. Clear commercial instincts, cool negotiation skills, absolute discretion and the ability to get on with a range of customers are vital attributes.

Key **administrative** roles include invoicing exhibitors or paying suppliers; ordering and checking film prints, trailers and posters; and arranging for materials to be delivered to the right place at the right time. You must be well organised with lots of drive and stamina.

If you're working on the **technical** or operational aspects of a release, you'll need current knowledge of digital formats, 3D and IMAX® presentation, servers and their storage capacities, and laboratory processes. It's vital that films are supplied for exhibition on time and in superlative quality.

Getting started

As you would expect, competition to break into the film industry is fierce. Being passionate about films is a great start. But it's only a start, not enough on its own.

The distribution business offers relentless yet rewarding work and sheer tenacity is an important quality in itself. If you're really determined, *keep at it!* Note how and where different genres of films are advertised, and on which local screens they tend to play. Try to keep informed about media trends and developments as well as the films themselves.

Some distributors employ **runners** and holiday relief to help out, while from time to time others offer **work placements**. Inevitably, vacancies in a small sector like distribution are relatively few and far between. A digest of placement opportunities is posted at FDA's website, www.launchingfilms.com. It may also help to keep an eye on publications where media jobs and placements are advertised. A little relevant experience can count for a lot.

Once you're in and have shown your aptitude, you may find that training courses are offered to help refine your knowledge and skills. Sometimes, in due course, opportunities arise to work in head offices or affiliates overseas.

For anyone who is in, or thinking of getting into, the creative industries, Creative Skillset exists to support UK-wide workforce training and skills development. Visit www.creativeskillset.org. As many filmmakers are quick to point out, the vital blueprint for a film is its screenplay. FDA commissions training sessions to help distributors refine their script reading skills. We work with training experts The Script Factory: more at www.scriptfactory.co.uk.

Best of luck.

ABOUT FILM DISTRIBUTORS' ASSOCIATION

As the trade body championing UK theatrical distributors, **FDA's mission** is to give our member companies and other contacts the generic support they need to make the most of their individual business opportunities. More info at www.launchingfilms.com

What we do

FDA has a busy work programme including audience research, sector training and 'one voice' representations on behalf of our sector where appropriate. We produce editorial planning tools for the media, such as central schedules of pre-release screenings for critics and 'showcase' preview events for other journalists.

Under FDA's auspices, senior representatives of our member companies meet to discuss matters of generic (non-commercial) interest to the sector and the industry as a whole. We promote the cinema line-up for the next season via media supplements, online vodcasts and compilation trailers, inviting audiences to consider extra cinema visits. As well as this *Guide*, we publish a *Yearbook* and some 'best practice' guidelines.

FDA is actively engaged in the fight against film theft, which threatens the jobs of people working in the film business here in the UK and may also diminish the choices available to audiences. We work closely with the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT) and other industry bodies such as the Alliance for Intellectual Property (IP), Creative Coalition and Industry Trust for IP Awareness.

We're also a member of organisations such as Cinema First, the British Screen Advisory Council (BSAC), the International Federation of Film Distributors' Associations (FIAD) and the European Digital Cinema Forum (EDCF). And we are proud to be a long-standing sponsor of the UK's National Film and Television School whose graduates populate the crews of many films released in cinemas.

FDA members

Films released by FDA's member companies account for 97% of UK cinema admissions.

Arrow Films

Artificial Eye Film Co.
www.artificial-eye.com

Axiom Films

Dogwoof
www.dogwoof.com

Entertainment One UK (eOne)

www.entertainmentone.co.uk

Entertainment Film Distributors

www.entertainmentfilms.co.uk

Eros International

www.erosentertainment.com

Icon Film Distribution

www.iconmovies.co.uk

Independent Film Distribution

Metrodome Group

www.metrodomegroup.com

Paramount Pictures

www.paramountpictures.co.uk

Park Circus

www.parkcircus.com

Pathé Productions

www.pathe.co.uk

Pinewood Distribution

Reliance Big Entertainment

www.reliancebigpictures.com

Soda Pictures

www.sodapictures.com

Sony Pictures Releasing

www.sonypictures.co.uk

StudioCanal

www.studiocanal.co.uk

Twentieth Century Fox Film Co.

www.fox.co.uk

Universal Pictures

www.universalpictures.co.uk

UTV Motion Pictures

www.utvgroup.com

Verve Pictures
www.vervepics.co.uk

Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, UK
www.disney.co.uk

Warner Bros. Entertainment
www.warnerbros.co.uk

The Works UK Distribution
www.theworksmediagroup.com

Here are a few UK websites you may like to explore, depending on your particular areas of interest:

Accessible cinema: www.yourlocalcinema.com
Alliance Against IP Theft: www.allianceagainstiptheft.co.uk
Annual film awards round-up: www.filmoftheyear.co.uk
British Academy of Film and Television Arts: www.bafta.org
British Board of Film Classification: www.bbfc.co.uk
British Federation of Film Societies: www.bffs.org.uk
British Film Institute: www.bfi.org.uk
British Screen Advisory Council: www.bsac.uk.com
British Video Association: www.bva.org.uk
Cinema Exhibitors' Association: www.cinemauk.org.uk
Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund: www.ctbf.co.uk
Coming soon to UK cinemas: www.moviepreviewnetwork.com
Creative Skillset: www.creativeskillset.org
Department for Culture, Media and Sport: www.culture.gov.uk
Fastest way to find any film in any format: www.findanyfilm.com
Federation Against Copyright Theft: www.fact-uk.org.uk
Film London: www.filmlondon.org.uk
Free preview screenings: www.seefilmfirst.com
Industry Trust for IP Awareness: www.copyrightaware.co.uk
National Film and Television School: www.nfts.co.uk
Producers' Alliance for Cinema and Television: www.pact.co.uk
Rentrak: www.rentrak.com

A wider range of links and information is available at FDA's website, www.launchingfilms.com.

UK FILM AND CINEMA FACTSHEET

- Every person watches an average of 84 films a year. The vast majority (around 80%) of these viewing occasions are when films are shown on television, especially among people aged 40+. Cinemas account for around 4% of total film viewings, with the home entertainment sector delivering the rest.
- In early 2013, the UK had 769 cinemas – a familiar and welcome part of urban landscapes – accommodating 3,767 screens.
- 62% of the UK population goes to the cinema at least once a year. *19% goes at least once a month.* Around 14 million cinema visits take place in an average month, with holiday periods tending to be the peak times (source: BFI).
- Every week on average, about 12 films are released in UK cinemas, generating annual box-office gross receipts (including VAT) of more than £1 billion.
- Distributors invest more than £330m a year to bring all these titles to market, launching and sustaining them in cinemas. In 2012, £184m of this was allocated to media advertising, the rest on film prints, advertising production, publicity, premieres and related costs.
- The highest grossing film of all time in UK cinemas is *Skyfall*. It was released in December 2012 and took over £100m at the box-office, the first film ever to do so, and achieving that in less than 10 weeks. Its UK cinema admissions were equivalent to a quarter of the population – and almost 9% of the entire year's box office.
- The filmed entertainment industries as a whole employ around 48,500 people in the UK, nearly two-thirds of them working in production.

CONTACT FDA

FDA welcomes any approach where UK film distributors' generic interests are concerned. With general enquiries or feedback, please email info@fda.uk.net. We aim to respond appropriately within three working days of receiving your enquiry.

To keep in touch with the fast-evolving world of UK film distribution, visit FDA's website, www.launchingfilms.com. You'll find a weekly film release schedule to download or search, a bank of industry data, a gateway of links and much more.

Get the insiders' views of the film business

You can explore UK film distribution further, and watch some people who work in the business talk about their roles, at our dedicated website:

www.launchingfilms.info

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FDA thanks all contributors to this revised and updated edition of the Guide, which supersedes all previous editions.

Information correct at time of going to press but subject to change.

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