



Michael Wiese Productions  
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## 10 Tips to Market and Promote your Independent Film

**1. Understand Your Target Audience** – When independently promoting a film or video, properly identifying your audience is a little difficult because you really have three separate audiences, not just one. They are:

- Those who will watch the product (consumers via purchase, rental or broadcast situations). Consider a viewer's gender, age, education, income, religion, race, occupation and location.
- Those who will buy/sell the product (distributors, acquisition agents, sub-distributors, video buyers). Each has different motivations and needs for product.
- Those who will promote the product (publicists, media, festival programmers). Their support is very important in gaining industry access.

**2. Analyze Your Hooks** – A good selling point for your film or video – or any other product for that matter – is known as a marketing "hook." Hooks are exploitable elements, aspects associated with the production that will attract those people who comprise your audience profile. Hooks take many forms – a person, place, thing, action or idea. Many times, a film or video's title alone will function as the marketing hook. Finding the right hook means a mediocre film can become wildly successful while a much more accomplished, yet hookless, project sits on a shelf. The survival and success of most independent films and videos are predominantly dependent upon realizing the proper hook to use in the promotional campaign. What is the single most-promotable element of your film or video that will attract its target audience?

**3. Create a Concise Logline** – Your movie or video project cannot be all things to all people. You should be able to define your film in one concise sentence, identifying its genre in the process while at the same time conveying the basic storyline to the potential viewer. This method of summarizing your entire film into a short sketch is known as the "logline." Consider your film's structure, genre, emotional pleas, characters, action and setting when writing a logline. Look to the movie listings in TV Guide for examples of well-conceived loglines. This logline will be used in most of your marketing efforts as a way to tell the story of your film. If you're planning a project for a very specified target audience (i.e., an urban or horror film) solicit this group for input before you start using your logline. It's vital that the core viewer understands your promotional campaign, especially so if they represent a small or limited number.

**4. Utilize Free Media** – Free media is usually known as publicity. Much of what you read in magazines, hear on the radio, see on TV and surf on the Net is a product of publicity, or, more specifically, the product of media or press releases. You can create and/or report on news that is then disseminated to the various media deemed appropriate for the subject. Information from situations surrounding the production

of an independent film is assembled in written format, supported with photos, videotape footage or samples and sent to the media in the form of a release. This kind of publicity should constitute the majority of your promotional campaign. Except for the time needed to create the information, and any negligible costs involved – postage, phone, paper, envelopes, videotape – it's free.

**5. Stage a Publicity Stunt** – The purpose of a publicity stunt is to arouse interest in both the public and the media – in a unique way. It's usually not so much something you want to invite these groups to witness (though that's not a bad idea), but rather something you do that will create attention on its own account. Examine your film or video for elements that you can exploit through a publicity stunt. This is a very necessary tactic for self-distributors because you do not have the budget available to advertise your project through common means. An attention-getting publicity stunt is one involving the public – the best scenario being bystanders in a public area who have no idea what to expect. Confrontational settings make for successful publicity stunts, and if your film or video features a controversial topic, exploit it for all it's worth. Try creating a human billboard for your film or video, staging appearances or costume contests at local video shops, making a float for any local parades and sponsoring some kind of contest that creates both consumer interaction and visual interest.

**6. Hold a Premiere** – A premiere is a great way to gather publicity for your film while at the same time throwing a fun party for all involved. To make sure the night is successful, consider the following:

- Invite all local print and broadcast media entertainment editors and reviewers
- Stage a publicity event on the night of the premiere
- Hold the premiere in a place that is fitting for the project. A bar is a good place for a "party" film, college auditorium for an edgy independent movie, local library screening room for an educational or children's-oriented video.
- Solicit smaller local broadcasters to simulcast the film in conjunction with its screening.
- Have a "celebrity" or two on hand for the event such as local politicians, sports figures and other well-known individuals in your community.
- "Salt" the audience with a good number of friends and supporters to ensure a favorable response. Coach them on appropriate laugh, gasp and applause points.
- Offer copies of the video or DVD available for purchase before and after the show.
- Distribute some small promotional item to everyone attending.
- Arrive in a limo. Really, it's worth the expense.

**7. Work with Sponsors** – Approach product manufacturers, service providers, restaurant and bar owners, media outlets and other companies to provide monetary, promotional or product/service sponsorship to facilitate the marketing of your film. Trade advertising space on your DVD sleeve in exchange for on-air commercials with a local cable channel. Splice a 30-second ad on the front of your film with a company that can provide you with printing, media or promotional opportunities. Think of situations that will allow you to reach larger or more targeted audience groups, then approach companies that are already successfully reaching these segments and work with them to "piggyback" on their efforts.

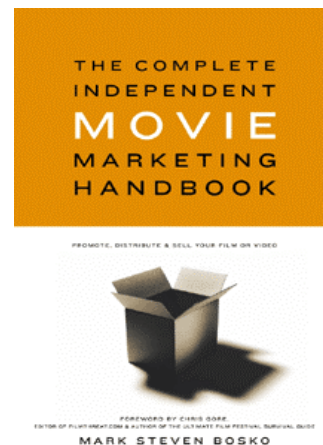
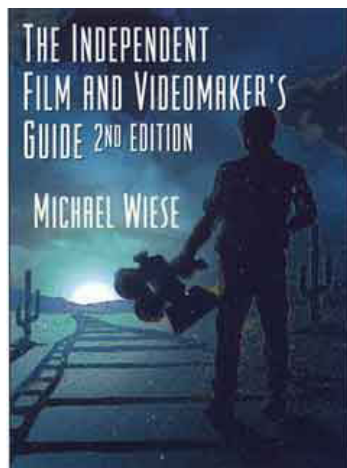
**8. Enter Appropriate Film Festivals** – Originally designed as a forum to present new and original independent films to a more "art-minded" audience, film festivals

have now become sales markets and publicity stops for most every kind of movie aimed at the general public. Showcasing shorts, features, experimental, 8mm, digital video, animation, adult, documentary, music and even Pixelvision movies, there really is a festival for everyone. But it is important to enter only those festivals that will provide some benefit to your promotional efforts. Answer the following to decide which is best for your specific film:

- How much will the film festival cost you in time, money and opportunity?
- How will the timing affect your promotional plan?
- How worthwhile is the festival?
- What kind of contacts and exposure will result from your participation?
- Is there a cash, product or distribution “prize”?
- How is the market aspect of the festival?

**9. Solicit Reviews** – With the ever-increasing number of media outlets operating on the planet, finding a source for reviews isn’t too tough. A quick glance through any publication, or a flip through the channels will uncover any number of review-oriented articles and programming. And, almost every single film and video advertisement – print or broadcast – features review quotes as part of its marketing message. Using reviews in this manner offers promoters a simple, cheap and effective way to influence an audience. An objective, third-party endorsement of your project is always more convincing than saying the same things yourself. Thus the popular habit of placing review quotes on film and video packaging. And, reviews don’t always have to come from entertainment-theme publications or writers. A review from a product manufacturer, service provider, non-Hollywood celebrity and others have just as much “oomph” if applicable to your film. For example, a review from a well-known surfboard designer for beach-theme flick is a pretty good idea.

**10. Use the Internet** – The benefits of using the Internet as a promotional medium are so numerous – low-cost, instant access, ease-of-use, non-invasive, constantly-available...it’s hard to know where to start. One thing is certain, however, the Internet should not simply be considered during the post-production promotional phase, but also implemented as early in the process of making your film or video as possible. Many projects without a frame shot or even a dollar of financing found, host world wide Web sites advertising their existence. This kind of proactive publicity can lead to financing, crews, media coverage, even distribution deals, and the best part, it’s really pretty cheap. Surf other successful and well-known film web sites for ideas (but don’t plagiarize) and adapt those features that seem relevant to your marketing efforts. Be sure your web site looks professional, is technologically sound and features an easy-to-find contact area.



For more detailed independent film marketing and promotion information and instruction, check out *The Independent Film and Videomaker's Guide* by Michael Wiese and *The Complete Independent Movie Marketing Handbook* by Mark Steven Bosko at [www.mwp.com](http://www.mwp.com).

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