



Ten Things I Learned at the IFFS

By Laurie Kirby, Executive Director, IFFS

I just wrapped the 8th Annual International Film Festival Summit in Austin where over 150 film festivals met to discuss the latest trends in the festival industry. I want to share the top ten things I learned from the panelists, attendees and sponsors at the event.

1. Festivals love their filmmakers and love to show the love. Filmmakers REALLY appreciate the airport pickup's, hotel rooms and other perks festivals provide. Filmmakers like Matthew Modine consider themselves "artists", not "celebrities" and consider the distinction very important. Filmmakers like James Chippendale are not so happy with the empty 500 seat theater (that they can't even find as no one provided directions) when they are being counter-programmed against the red carpet event. Solution: Smaller theaters and better publicity outreach for the more obscure films. As Nancy Schafer, Executive Director of the Tribeca Film Festival explained the big films take care of themselves; it's the little guys that need the help.
2. Music and film are becoming more intertwined, as music documentaries are audience favorites. More festivals are incorporating live music into their festivals as a way to bring in younger and hip audience members.
3. The fact that so many festivals now own theaters (think Mill Valley, Toronto and NY Film Festival) is good news for filmmakers. With year-round programming, the festivals need content and filmmakers have more opportunity to show their films out of the festival cycle.
4. The conference yielded practical tips. One such idea--festivals and filmmakers should get their branded t-shirts, hats and posters out to the volunteers and champions of the films a month before to get the word out. Make them your advance street team.
5. Digital is changing the industry. As the theaters move to mostly digital platforms, festivals are besieged with issues such as affording the new equipment needed to exhibit the films, problems with encryption codes, advising filmmakers on formats and more. Mark Fishkin, Executive Director of The Mill Valley Film Festival, "The digital transaction is going to affect every aspect of your business and will make the difference between success and failure. From DCP compliance to new screens we need to wake up to that," states Karl Mehrer of K2 Imaging. "The commercial conversion to digital-only exhibition has many implications for festivals over the next few years. There will be a steep learning curve that will certainly provide many

technical and logistical lessons for us all.”

6. Socially aware companies are eager to be aligned with festivals. The audiences are in their sweet spot as this is great for businesses with green messaging. There are many sponsorship opportunities that include cash, product and budget---reducing goods and services. Lesa Ukman, CEO of IEG, Inc. told the audience that activation and solution---driven marketing ideas for sponsors should be the festivals driving force when procuring them.
7. Festivals should serve as a mouthpiece for world issues. Cameron Bailey, co--- director of Toronto Film Festival described its commitment to using film programming to broaden awareness of global social issues. He scours the world for films without a platform and brings them to Toronto to connect people without just focusing on awards and stars.
8. There are many resources out there to make the festivals more professionally run now. The latest technology can make festivals better organized, find and retain volunteers, optimize social media, integrate databases, sort and track films, provide scheduling and measure audience reviews.
9. Festivals are truly an incredible vehicle to market films. Films gets legs, buzz, and for the lucky few a theatrical distribution deal that would otherwise never happen. The distribution channels are not just theatrical with the advent of VOD, streaming and downloadable viewing as well as multiple cable options.
10. Festivals and filmmakers need each other. Graham Leggat, the San Francisco’s Film Society executive director passed away this year and was honored at IFFS. Festivals need to honor his commitment and passion as he once explained that we must continue to explore the role film plays in “truth and beauty and the importance of narrative in social exploration. Film festivals must be able to deliver transformative, liberating experiences. “