

# 6 Secret Lies Of Film Distribution By Jerome Courshon

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**One of the major Achilles' heels for Film Producers and Directors is the distribution game.**

**Once you've made your movie, what do you do? How do you play the 'game'? What strategies do you employ? Is there even a strategy??**

Well, there's good news and bad news. The good news is there are indeed strategies to use and employ. The bad news is that most filmmakers don't know what they are, and flounder around trying to figure them out. What's even worse—currently—is too many filmmakers throwing in the towel and just dumping their film online, hoping it “hits” somehow.

In this article, I'm going to debunk some prevalent lies (*or “myths”*) about achieving distribution. This will give you some insight into the game, should you be looking for distribution now or preparing for your production.

## Myth #1

I'm a director, a filmmaker, a creative person. Telling stories is my thing and if I make a good movie, I don't have to worry about the business stuff or the marketing because someone else will do that.

## Truth #1

There are of course some people who get lucky and either have a producing partner who does all the business & marketing (and is good at it), or they have the money to hire the right people to do everything.

However for most this isn't the case, especially if one's film career is in the early stages. You need to become a businessperson once your movie or documentary is done. At least until it's sold (or until you're done selling if you're DIY'ing it).

### Why?

Because distribution is business, and distributors don't care if you've made the greatest indie film, art film or documentary of the past 20 years.

What they care about is if it will make them money. (*And your audience—if you're DIY'ing your film—needs to believe they'll be sufficiently entertained and/or enlightened before they'll buy a DVD or pay to watch it online.*) The **more** you can become a "salesperson" and marketing maven, the **more** success you will have on your quest for distribution or sales.

Yes, I know this part isn't nearly as sexy & fun as making movies and can be downright boring at times. But as Orson Welles famously said about the film business long ago—and is still true today: "**It's about 2% moviemaking and 98% hustling.**"

## Myth #2

Distributors are calling me and they're excited to see my movie! I'll send it to them and if they like it, they'll acquire it!

## Truth #2

All major distributors track the movies that have been listed in the production sections of various trades/websites. If you were in those sections, you're going to be phoned.

Do not send them a rough cut. Do not send them a final cut. Do not send them the movie. If you

**do, you will not get a theatrical distribution deal, if this is what you are aiming for.**

You must “unveil” your movie in the right place at the right time—such as a **top** film festival—to get the theatrical buyers to **really** want your feature. Movies do not get picked up for major theatrical releases that have been sent on a DVD to a distributor. So when they call asking to see a screener, you’ll say “It’s not ready, but I appreciate your call. Check back with me in a month or two.” (*And you’ll do this every time they call, until you’re ready for the grand unveiling.*)

## Myth #3

My movie was selected for the Sundance Film Festival... Woohooo! All I have to do is show up and I will get a deal!

## Truth #3

**Okay, you won the lottery and got a slot at one of the top three film festivals (Sundance, Toronto, Cannes) for your movie premiere.**

**Guess what? Your work hasn’t even begun yet. You now must assemble a team of people—a PR**

**firm, an agent from one of the top agencies in Los Angeles, an attorney, and possibly a producer’s rep. (But beware... most producer reps are useless.)**

You will have to work, strategize and position your movie—before it premieres—as a very desirable movie that distributors must have. You have one shot at the top festivals for a serious theatrical deal, so don’t piss it away. Unfortunately, too many filmmakers don’t know or understand this. They get a slot at Sundance or Toronto, don’t assemble a team or promote their film properly, and then come away without a deal and are entirely lost as to their next step.

## Myth #4

I was rejected by the top festivals, so now I’m submitting and getting accepted by the next tier of festivals. This is cool. All I have to do is show up to my screenings and I’m treated like a rock star. Distribution, here I come!

## Truth #4

**Yeah, okay, if this is you, at least you’re having fun. But you’re not going to get distribution this way. There is a real purpose to the festival circuit beyond the top festivals, that most people—even Hollywood veterans—simply do not understand.**

**The obvious purpose is, of course, exposure. But there is actually a MORE important purpose: Building a Pedigree.**

## What is a Pedigree?

It is an accumulation of press coverage, interviews, quotes from critics, awards if you can get them—that says you have a winning movie on your hands. Once you methodically build this pedigree—which takes some work on the festival circuit—you are then ready to parlay this into a distribution deal (or healthy sales). It's a simple concept that most do not grasp; yet it is **extremely powerful and effective** for independent films that don't get into the top festivals. There is real psychology involved in the “art” of selling a movie or documentary. Ignore at your own risk. **However, if you learn this “art,” you will have success.**

### Myth #5

I've submitted my film to the 15 Home Video Companies out there. I've even talked to producer friends and looked at industry reference books for who to submit to. If these 15 companies say 'No,' I'm out of luck for a home video deal.

### Truth #5

**This truth right here may be worth serious dollars to you. There are literally over 100 Home Video Companies in the marketplace, all operating under their own labels.**

**On top of that are additional companies that pick up movies and programming that have output deals with these distributors. So if you think you've exhausted your search for a home video deal and have only contacted a handful of companies, you've simply just begun.**

And don't buy the occasional diatribe out there that DVD is dead. It's not. It is still the largest revenue generating segment of the entire film industry. Last year alone, it generated \$15.6 Billion in revenues (in the USA). That's Billion with a 'B.'

### Myth #6

I'm going to bypass traditional distribution altogether, sell my movie on the internet myself and make a ton of money from digital sales (VOD, Streaming, Download-to-Own).

### Truth #6

**Not likely. For the 5,000+ movies being made every year, there are less than 20 who make big money this way. WHY? It's hard work. It takes time (a lot of it), it takes specific strategies, and you become the de facto distributor for a good year, if not longer.**

**Which isn't an exciting proposition for most filmmakers, who've already been on a lengthy and arduous journey of making their film.**

However, some who go this route do it **very** successfully. They're either great at marketing already, or great learners. And they're very committed to achieving success, so they really do what it takes to attain that. Also, the budget of your movie can dictate if this route is viable for you. If you've made a \$10,000 movie, it's not that difficult to recoup this amount, with some decent work. But if your budget was \$1 Million, good luck making your money back using only the internet. You'll either need traditional distribution, or a hybrid approach of **both** traditional and non-traditional distribution.

**So these are a few of the popular and misleading myths out there, and the truth about them.**

With 5,000+ movies being made every single year, that's a lot of producers and directors working with often erroneous information. Not to mention an overwhelming number of films vying for a limited number of distribution slots. These two factors combined can make for a daunting journey filled with frustration and failure.

**The silver lining however**, is that with the right knowledge, coupled with some diligent work, anyone with a decent film can achieve success. **ANYONE**. But it does take the **right knowledge**. You do not have to have star names in your movie to get a deal or have success, and your movie does not have to be phenomenal. If it's at least decent, you do have a real shot.



Film Producer & Distribution Expert **Jerome Courshon** has assisted hundreds of filmmakers with achieving distribution through his classes, speaking engagements, and consultations.

For more info about him or his new 3-Day Program, **"THE SECRETS TO DISTRIBUTION: Get Your Movie Distributed Now!"** visit: [www.Distribution.LA](http://www.Distribution.LA)