

How to Work the AFM: 9 Steps for Producers

The American Film Market is a great place to pitch your project or film - if you have a plan. Use these steps to increase your chances of success.

PROLOGUE

If you have a project or script, the most effective use of your time and money is to purchase an AFM Industry Pass which allows access to all offices and most screenings beginning Sunday, (Day 5), or an Industry Pass Plus which begins on Saturday (Day 4) and includes four days of conferences. Buy your badge by October 10. After that date, the fees go up.

STEP 1: Homework: Create a List of Target Companies

Over 400 production / distribution companies have offices at the AFM but not all are right for your film. Focus your time and effort on the companies best suited for your project.

Starting about one month before the AFM, go to The Film Catalogue. Most AFM companies list their projects, profile and staff contact information. Do further research on the web. Find the companies that are the best candidates for your film.

Once you have created a target list, count the companies on it. If there are less than 10, you're being too picky. ["No distributor is right for MY film!"] If there are 100 or more, your homework grade is "incomplete." Keep working. A good target list for most projects is 30 – 50 companies.

STEP 2: More Homework: Create a List of Target Executives

For each of your target companies, identify the key executives. Most important are the people in charge of acquisitions, development and production. Look for their names in the trades and on company websites. If you can't find the right names, call the company's main office and ask.

Finding out who's who is critical. You will never get anywhere by walking into an office unprepared and saying: "Hi, who is your head of acquisitions? I'd like to meet with him... or her."

STEP 3: Start Scheduling Meetings

Most companies start setting their meeting schedule three or four weeks before the market. The best way to contact them is to send a short, personalized email. After a few days, follow-up by phone.

STEP 4: Prioritize Your Target List

Separate your list into two groups: companies with an office in the city where you live and those from everywhere else. Focus first on the companies that aren't based where you live. If you are unable to meet with a company from your home city during the AFM, you can always follow-up with them after the Market. Use other factors (i.e. the budgets and genres of the company's AFM lineup) to create A and B lists with 20 to 30 companies on each list. This will help prioritize your time near the end of Market.

STEP 5: Work on Your Pitch

A good pitch can get a bad film made and a bad pitch can leave a terrific project languishing on the shelf. Pitching is part art (it's a creative process), part science (pitches need to be organized and follow a tight script) and part salesmanship. There are many resources on pitching, so our only advice is:

- If you are madly, deeply in love with your project, if it's your only child and the AFM is its first day of school, get someone else to do the pitch. Pitching it yourself will definitely convince people that YOU love the project but it probably won't do much more.
- In the pitch meeting, remember that YOU are being evaluated along with your project. When a company commits to your project, they are also committing to work with you.
- Your mission during each pitch meeting isn't to sell your project. You won't get a deal in one brief meeting. Your mission is simply: Get the second meeting!
- Consider attending the Pitch Conference Saturday morning.
- Read AFM's Pitching Essentials

STEP 6: Make More Appointments

During the first days of the AFM (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday) call each target company's AFM office that didn't respond to your email or first call. Request a 10 minute meeting with the key executive you identified in Step 2. AFM office phone numbers are listed in the AFM Show Directory (available at the Information desk in the Loews lobby). Ask for a meeting on Saturday (*Plus Pass*), Sunday, Monday or Tuesday as most companies will be too busy during the first few days. For companies that won't set a meeting (prepare yourself – there will be many), see [Step 9](#) below.

STEP 7: Prepare Materials

Here are some thoughts on what to leave behind after every meeting:

- Your business card. Bring a large supply.
- Your biography and those of all producers attached to the project.
- A synopsis.
- A summary of the film's unique creative and financial attributes. This could include a list of all people attached or committed to the project, a budget abstract (that's less than half a page), any rights that aren't available, investors that are committed, production incentives that you know the film can utilize, etc.
- If the script is done, bring one or two copies with you but don't leave it behind without first consulting with your attorney.

These are just our suggestions – every film and situation is different. Be prepared, but don't bring copies of letters or documents that "prove" anything. It's too soon for that.

STEP 8: Work The Show Before You Go

Done with your homework? Made your appointments? Confident with your pitch? Materials ready? Great! There's still plenty you can do at the AFM before you get your badge on Sunday:

- Attend the [AFM Conference Series](#). Consider an [Industry Pass Plus](#), as it includes access on Saturday, too!
- If this is your first AFM, attend the [AFM Orientation](#).
- Read the show trades daily to stay on top of trends and deals.

STEP 9: It's Showtime!

Here, in order, are your priorities for:

- Arrive at every scheduled meeting on time. Be prepared to be "bumped" or delayed. Don't take it personally – selling comes before buying.
- Visit the companies that wouldn't schedule a meeting with you on the phone. Remember: always ask for an appointment with a specific person.
- Visit companies on your B list and those you couldn't easily profile in Step 1. Get a feel for the product they handle and the culture of the company to see if they are the right fit for your film. Consider being a "stealth participant" by picking up brochures and business cards without introducing yourself. Don't ask for a meeting while you are there. (If you've just walked in and asked a bunch of questions, stuffed your bag with their collateral and grabbed every business card, it isn't likely you'll get a meeting. Instead, wait half an hour and call the company to schedule a meeting . . . with a specific person.

ADDITIONAL STEPS: Producers with a Finished Film

The steps above are for producers, filmmakers and writers with projects and scripts. If you have a completed film and are looking for global distribution, congratulations! Everything above generally applies but you will need to move-up the timetable:

- One month before the AFM, prepare 4 – 6 minutes of selected scenes. Do not create a consumer type trailer. Acquisition executives will want to see complete scenes to get a feel for the film. Put the selected scenes on a website so companies you contact can see them before committing to a meeting.
- When you contact your target companies, include the link to your selected scenes.
- Create DVD screeners so that qualified prospects can quickly view your film in advance of the AFM. If you can arrange for a screening instead, that would be much better.
- Set your initial meetings with each company in the first four days of the Market. Let them know you are arriving on Wednesday and will close a deal before the market is over.
- Purchase an [Executive Pass](#) (You've invested a lot of time and money - don't get cheap now!)
- Make sure your attorney will be available to you throughout the AFM.

EPILOGUE

We can't give you personal advice on how to pitch your project or film but we'd like to know how this information worked for you. After the Market, please send your thoughts to AFM@ifta-online.org, Attention: Work the AFM Feedback.

Good Luck!

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