Independent Film Marketing – Syllabus

[Course and Section Number]

[Semester]

[Course Schedule; Days/Times]

[Course Location/Room and Building Assignment]

[Professor’s Name]

[Professor’s Telephone Number]

[Professor’s Email Address]

[Office Location]

[Office Hours]

*Independent Film Marketing* is a fast paced, highly-interactive course designed to give students the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to brand, market and promote themselves and their films.

Starting with a brief overview of the current state of the global film market, the course will explore and emphasize the importance of strategic marketing considerations throughout the filmmaking process, including development, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution. We will consider the key elements of film marketing plans including market research, audience segmentation, the development of marketing and promotional collateral (such as key art, teasers & trailers, electronic press kits, public releases, websites, social media platforms, IMDb listings, behind-the-scenes content, etc.), and campaign budgeting and scheduling. In addition, the course will cover global film distribution and the role of industry professionals such as producers of marketing and distribution (PMDs), producer’s representatives, sales agents, distributors, entertainment attorneys and accountants, and independent film and distribution consultants and organizations.

Please Note: A very important part of each class session will be an open discussion on current topics of interest that affect independent film marketing and distribution. When appropriate, guest lecturers will be featured. Please be aware that the success of this course, and each student’s final grade, will, in part, be determined by (i) the level of advanced reading and understanding of course material evidenced during class and (ii) the engagement and participation each student demonstrates during course discussions, guest lectures, and activities.

**Learning Objectives and Outcomes**

The objective of this course is to provide students with (i) an introduction to the global film market and the current and emerging issues that impact audience demand for – and distribution of – independent films; (ii) an understanding of the strategic and market-considerations in developing and “green-lighting” individual films and the branding, marketing and promotional campaigns which support those films; and (iii) how to oversee and supervise the creation and implementation of marketing and promotional materials and activities. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

* Speak knowledgeably about film industry dynamics (particularly with regard to issues associated with audience demand and distribution) and emerging trends;
* Continually expand their professional network and deliver well-structured strategic pitches to potential investors, sales agents, and other industry professionals;
* Understand and explain the role of market research, distribution trends and audience segmentation in story selection and script development;
* Develop and evaluate the effectiveness of various marketing materials and activities, including: key art and posters, teasers and trailers, behind-these-scenes content, IMDb listings, social media and video marketing, websites, electronic press kits, public releases, event marketing, promotional merchandise, product placement and marketing coop partnerships, and more.
* Describe the role of sales agents, producer’s representatives, consultants and independent film organizations in assisting the independent filmmaker in making decisions with regard to global rights vs. split-rights, including domestic and foreign licensing, video-on-demand, etc.; and,
* Directly support an experienced Producer of Marketing & Distribution (PMD) with the supervision of the branding, marketing, promotion and distribution of an independent feature film.

**Text Books**

Barnwell, R. (2019). Guerrilla Film Marketing: The Ultimate Guide to the Branding, Marketing and Promotion of Independent Films & Filmmakers. New York, NY: Routledge.

[**Attention Film Educator**: *Guerrilla Film Marketing* provides an emphasis on independent films and in providing readers with the resources and step-by-step instructions on how best to develop and create marketing campaigns, materials and collateral, and execute a variety of branding, marketing and promotional activities. To better provide context and additional information on the approaches traditionally employed by the major studios, many educators find that the inclusion of a second-text, such as Robert Marich’s *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), is helpful.]

**Recommended Reading**

In order to participate in important class discussions on current topics of interest, students should read and be familiar with the current edition of PriceWaterhouseCooper’s (PWC) *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook* and the MPAA’s *Annual Industry Report*. Students are also encouraged to read articles from such publications as: *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and film-industry related coverage from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

**Class Schedule**

Below you will find a general outline of the expected class flow. Due to the availability of guest lecturers and changes in their schedules, topic dates are subject to change.

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| **Session #1** | **Introduction to the Course and Grading Standards**  Overview of the film industry; compare and contrast the economics of major studio films vs that of low-budget independent films; and the resulting marketing and promotional demands placed on independent films and filmmakers given business and market demands. Students are expected to come to class having read the Introduction to the text, Guerrilla Film Marketing.  [If using Marich’s *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics,* Chapter 10, Major Studios, is likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #2** | **Chapter One: Branding, Marketing and Promotion**  Students should be prepared to discuss the $500,000 - $2.5 million suggested budget range for low-budget independent films. Why does the range not begin lower? Why not higher? What implication does this have for the marketing and promotional budgets of low-budget independent films? Review and discus the key ingredients and characteristics of successful guerrilla marketing; the strategic and marketing objectives of independent films (including critical success factors and AIDA framework); the marketing process; marketing and promotional demands across each stage of film production; marketing materials, activities and channels; performance and activity measures/metrics; and the role of the producer of marketing and distribution.  [If using Marich’s *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics,* Chapter One, Creative Strategy, and Chapter Three, Traditional Media Advertising, are likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #3** | **Chapter Two: Creating an Irresistible Brand Identity**  Students should be prepared to discuss their own career ambitions and how they plan to use the information contained within the chapter to create their own brand identity. Students should define what it means to have a brand; given their ambitions, what elements make up a successful brand? What type of proof-points are expected of a professional filmmaker? What are some of the components of a personal brand story? What are the elements of a personal brand? Discuss common touch-points and branding outlets.  [To reinforce the concepts found within Chapter 2, it is often helpful for students to create a professional biography of the filmmaker they hope to be (along with achievements) in 10-years time. In addition, each student should outline the specific knowledge, skills, experience and achievements required to get from where they are today to the future professional they describe.] |
| **Session #4** | **Chapter Four: Marketability vs Playability**  Understand the role of market research (and market-orientation) in the development, production and marketing of successful films. Further, students should be able to clearly compare and contrast the concepts of marketability and playability as well as how the chapter’s discussion of blockbusters, script elements, and production value relate to these two concepts.  [If using Marich’s Marketing to *Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Chapter Two, Market Research, is likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #5** | **Chapter Five: Pitching & Networking**  The ability to (i) successfully pitch film industry professionals (particularly film investors) and (ii) build a personal and professional network comprised of highly-regarded and capable industry professionals are two of the most important – and overlooked – skills of the successful independent filmmaker. Students should be familiar with each of the 8-step pitching process. In particular, each student should understand the critical nature of creating pitches (and presentation materials and other “leave behinds”) that speak to the objectives of both the filmmaker and his or her negotiating partner. Likewise, the filmmaker should be prepared to discuss the importance of networking and methods of expanding their professional network.  [Before commencing the formal class lecture, it may be helpful to ask students what they think the key is to a successful pitch presentation. While students may legitimately provide a list of possibilities, the professor is advised to steer the discussion to two key points: (i) Being able to consider and conduct discussions from the opposing person or organization’s point of view; and (ii) assuring that the filmmaker, his/her team, and the project is highly-credible relative to the request and opposing person or organization’s expectations. Having established these two points, students should gleen clearer and more powerful insights from the lecture of pitching and networking which follow.] |
| **Session #6** | **Chapters Three and Ten: Engaged Community & Social Media**  Discuss the value and nature of audience engagement, including managing the engagement experience, building a community of fans, methods of driving engagement, variety of community-generated content, and particular emphasis on the value of the launch team. Explore the relationship between audience engagement and social media marketing, the variety of social media channels, the particular value and popularity of micro-blogging (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and video marketing (YouTube and Vimeo), as well as methods of optimizing social media platforms and content for increased views, likes comments, shares, friends, fans and subscribers.  [If using Marich’s Marketing to *Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Chapter Four, Marketing in Digital Media, is likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #7** | **Mid-Term Examinations** |
| **Session #8** | **Chapter Six: Key Art & Posters**  Mid-term examinations will be returned and class will discuss correct answers professor sought/anticipated to each question.  Describe the difference between key art and posters, the factors that determine good key art from poor key art, design and genre-specific considerations, the selection of color-schemes, various layout and composition conventions, central, foreground and background images, titles, taglines, credit blocks and other text, and typography. Time permitting, the class will break-down the elements of one or more currently-released major studio films. |
| **Session #9** | **Chapter Seven: Teasers & Trailers**  Students should be prepared to discuss the differences between teasers and trailers as well as the various types of trailers employed in the marketing and promotion of films and filmmakers; teaser and trailer elements; the trailer production process; logline and story patterns; trailer structure; establishing rhythm and tone through music selection; the process of editing teasers and trailers; and teaser and trailer distribution.  As with key art and posters, should time permit, the class will view and break-down teasers or trailers of one or more currently-released major studio films. |
| **Session #10** | **Chapters Eight and Nine: Behind-The-Scenes (“BTS”) and IMDb Marketing and Promotion**  While commonly under-utilized, particularly within independent film marketing campaigns, behind-the-scenes content is among the most interesting and broadly-shared promotional material. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the considerations involved in hiring and supervising a BTS crew, the types of film stills and BTS photos that audience-members find most appealing, the variety of valued BTS video and film footage, BTS interviews and commentary, the production of featurettes and short “Making of…” documentaries, and the many channels available through which to distribute BTS content.  The class will also cover another under-utilized and under-appreciated topic: the importance of IMDb profiles and listings. Among global audience-members, IMDb is consistently listed among the top 3 sites used to learn more about specific films and to assist in making decisions with regard to which moves to attend, purchase, rent or otherwise view. As a result, IMDb listings and profiles are also one of the most valuable channels of distributing BTS photographs and videos. |
| **Session #11** | **Chapter Eleven: Websites**  Discuss Stanford University’s website credibility and retention study and what it means to film marketers (and to the student’s own personal sites.) What role does a particular website or website page’s objectives and calls-to-action play in the design and content of the website and corresponding pages? Be prepared to provide examples of various objectives and calls-to-action. What are some of the common pages or menu items for a filmmakers’ professional website? A production company or studio website? An official film website? What are the two principle roles/objectives of the website’s home page? What types of content are commonly included in the “About” page? Media or Press Room page? How do the search engines determine which sites appear at the top page of, or among the very first, search listing? How can filmmakers optimize on-page/on-site and off-page/off-site search factors? Discuss some the types of metrics/measures that reflect the performance of the website. What measures/metrics reveal whether or not the site is meeting the filmmaker’s goals and objectives? What measures/metrics reveal whether or not the site is meeting the visitors goals and objectives? |
| **Session #12** | **Chapters Twelve and Thirteen: Media Relations, Public Releases, EPKs**  Media coverage commonly provides you and your films access to audiences you might not otherwise have had access. And, because you are being covered by one of that audience’s favored traditional or new-media outlets, you and your film benefit from the credibility and prestige of that particular media outlet. Given the value of media coverage, students should be able to discuss the creation and value of the EPK and press books, the development of a media strategy, how to build media relationships and pitch story ideas, how to participate in print and broadcast interviews, and how to write public releases.  [If using Marich’s Marketing to *Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Chapter Seven, Publicity, is likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #13** | **Chapter Fourteen: Event Marketing**  Event marketing is one of the only marketing and promotional channels providing direct personal interaction with members of your audience and professional network. Although commonly more expensive than other marketing and promotional activities, the value of event marketing is often more than sufficient to offset such costs. Students should be prepared to discuss the various types of events, the different value provided by these various events, the criteria filmmakers should use when decided which events to attend or host, the common questions to anticipate following a film festival premier and during panel discussions, and how to best leverage such events within your ongoing marketing and promotional campaigns. |
| **Session #14** | **Chapter Sixteen: Distribution**  Students should be prepared to discuss how the filmmaker’s branding, marketing and promotional campaigns support the film’s distribution and anticipated release; the differences between traditional (global) distribution, self-distribution and hybrid distribution; the role of attorneys, producer’s representatives, sales agents, and independent film consultants and organizations in successful distribution; the variety of distribution channels; some of the “headline” legal issues con consider when distributing your film; and ways in which filmmakers can get a successful head-start on distribution. Finally, students should be prepared to discuss the vital role of the launch team in driving sales, rentals, views, reviews and ratings.  The class session will close with a discussion of the scheduled final examination and suggested study topics.  [If using Marich’s Marketing to *Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, Chapter Eight, Distribution in Theaters, Chapter Nine, Exhibition, and Chapter 11, Indpendent Distributors, are likewise recommended.] |
| **Session #15** | **Final examinations** |
| **Session #16** | **Final projects due.**  **Review final examinations.**  **Course summary, discussion and wrap-up** |

Depending upon the individual degree’s program requirements, course pre-requisites, and the students’ knowledge, skills and abilities, there are a wide variety of possible assignments from which to choose (or develop) in support of *Independent Film Marketing*. For classes in which students have fundamental graphic design experience and familiarity with Adobe Creative Suite applications, assignments which involve the creation of key art, teasers & trailers, electronic press kits, and other materials could be of great value (such projects could be assigned on either an individual or small group-basis.)

For classes in which such skills are not a pre-requisite or common among the students, assignments should reinforce three key course messages: (i) that major-studio films establish the audience’s expectations of the entertainment the consume (and that, yes, this applies to low-budget independent films); (ii) commercial film development (as well as associated marketing, branding and distribution decisions) must be market-oriented on a basis of comprehensive market research and an understanding of current global distribution trends; and, finally, (iii) that the film and its marketing and promotion must reflect the film’s genre and genre-audience expectations.

That said, the following is a list and description of six (6) popular course assignments from which to choose and/or revise:

**1. Film Marketing Campaign Analysis (3-5 hours)**

Select film currently in theaters or films currently being marketed and promoted for a release within the following 120-days or less. Provide the following details and respond to the following questions:

1. Title
2. Tagline
3. Genre
4. MPAA Rating
5. Date of release
6. Production Company
7. Director
8. Production Budget
9. Film Summary/Synopsis
10. Target audience/segment
11. Official website URL
12. Official Facebook address/URL
13. Official YouTube address/URL
14. Representative list and summary of recent media coverage (The list should be comprised of 10-15 articles, broad cast appearances, or other types of media coverage; the name of media outlet/organizations, 1-2 sentence description of the nature of coverage, and publication dates.)
15. Posters jpegs
16. Advertisement placement (describe the type of advertisement placement – print, banner, broadcast, etc., where the ad appeared, and the ad placement dates)
17. EPK contents (letter of introduction/cover-letter, director’s statement, production notes, sell-sheet, credit list, poster(s), BTS photographs, BTS interviews, quoted critical acclaim/reviews, etc.)
18. Describe IMDb listing and its contents (particularly any associated photographs, videos, etc.)
19. Reviews and ratings at leading sites (3-4 sites are sufficient)Film festival and award nominations and wins

**2. Film Poster Analysis (2-3 hours)**

Select a poster from any major-studio film (past, current or future films are all acceptable). Provide the following details and respond to the following questions:

1. Title of film, genre, name of production companies, name of director, MPAA rating, date of release.
2. What is the name of designer or design-house responsible for the poster?
3. Is this a four-quadrant film? At which audience-members, if any, would the film particularly appeal? What elements do you believe were included in the poster to broaden the film’s appeal?
4. Briefly, what is the film about?
5. What are the key visual components of the film? Title? Tagline? Main image? Foreground images? Background images? Other textures or visual elements? Text block? Etc.
6. What are the principle colors used in the poster?
7. What design framework/layout (eg Grid, Rule-of-Thirds, Circular/Oval, Z-Layout, Perspective or Combination/Hybrid) does the poster employ?
8. What elements of the film would an audience find particularly appealing? How are these elements of the film reflected in the poster?
9. Compare and contrast the poster to 2-other film posters from the same genre. What are some of the common elements or traits? In what ways does the poster you selected differ?

**3. Trailer Analysis (2-3 hours)**

Select a trailer for a major-studio film (past, current or future films are all acceptable). Provide the following details and respond to the following questions:

1. Title of film, genre, name of production companies, name of director, date of release
2. Provide a brief 2-3 sentence summary of the film.
3. Which trailer-house is responsible for the trailer?
4. Is this a four-quadrant film? At which audience-members, if any, would the film particularly appeal? What elements do you believe were included in the trailer to broaden the film’s appeal?
5. What is the length or running-time of the trailer?
6. Describe the opening of the trailer? Does it begin with the film’s title? Production company title cards or animated logos? Other information or details about the film? Or does the teaser immediately begin with a clip – or series of clips – from the film?
7. At what point is the title of the film introduced via text or voice-over? How many times does the title of the film appear (in either form)?
8. Does the trailer mention the film’s stars? The author of the script? Director? Producer? Any other individuals responsible for the film?
9. Describe the nature of the shots included in the trailer.
10. How many different music clips are included within the trailer?
11. Does the rhythm and pacing of the trailer change with corresponding changes in music, shot-selection, or both? How so?
12. How does the trailer end? What is included in the final frame? Does it provide a release date? A website? Any additional details or information? If not, describe how the trailer-house and editor decided to end the trailer.

**4. Electronic Press kit (EPK) Analysis (2-3 hours)**

Select an electronic press-kit for a major-studio film (past, current or future films are all acceptable). Provide the following details and respond to the following questions:

1. Title of film, genre, name of production companies, name of director, date of release
2. Is this a four-quadrant film? At which audience-members, if any, would the film particularly appeal? What elements do you believe were included in the EPK to broaden the film’s appeal?
3. What are the contents of the press kit? Letter of Introduction/Cover-Letter? Director’s Statement? Production Notes? Sell-sheet? Credit list? Poster(s)? BTS Photographs? BTS Interviews? Quoted critical acclaim/reviews? Other?
4. Which key words and phrases are emphasized?
5. What about visuals? Is there a common-theme among the images that were chosen to be included within the EPK?
6. What aspects of the film are highlighted throughout the press kit? (particular actors, locations, scenes, special effects, etc.)
7. Which cast and crew-members were quoted within the production notes? What was the subject/topic of each quote? Past films in the franchise? Starring or featured actors? Director? Scriptwriter? Technical challenges? Particular characters, locations, props, shots or scenes?
8. What were the three key messages or points you believe the press kit was attempting to make? Which elements of the press kit served to support these key messages or points?

**5. Official Website Analysis (2-3 hours)**

[Note: Official websites are those designed, developed and published by the film’s producers.]

Select a major-studio film (past, current or future films are all acceptable). Provide the following details and respond to the following questions:

1. Title of film, URL/address of official site, genre, name of production companies, name of director, date of release
2. What is the name of designer or studio responsible for the design and development of the site?
3. Is this a four-quadrant film? At which audience-members, if any, would the film particularly appeal? What elements do you believe were included in the website to broaden the film’s appeal?
4. What is the primary objective(s) of the website? What are the primary calls-to-action? What form do the calls-to-action take? Banner adverts? Hotlinks? In text requests (to rent or purchase the film or take other action?
5. What are the contents of the website? Menu items in the navigation bar? Page titles? What elements have been included? (If the film is included as a part of the studio or production company’s official website, list only the film-specific menu-items and page titles)
6. How does the site design and colors employed compare and contrast to those employed within the film, its poster/key art and other marketing and promotional materials? Are colors used to emphasize any particular calls-to-action or reinforce the site or pages primary objective(s)?
7. What interactive features are included on the site? Video teasers or trailers? Sliders with photographs? Online film-related games? Downloads? Other?
8. Does the website encourage registration, subscription or email submission? For what purposes? What incentives, if any, are provided for doing so?
9. What reasons, if any, are provided for first-time visitors to return to the website?
10. Does the site include any credibility enhancements such as film festival laurels or award nominations/wins; audience testimonials; excerpts from critical and/or audience ratings and reviews; other?

**6. Film Marketing Project (3-5 hours)**

Select a film that is currently “in-development” (such films may be found on IMDb and various trade publications, and a simple online search), and create a marketing plan/campaign (with calendar) for the film. (A simple 2-page marketing plan has been provided within the appendices of Guerrilla Film Marketing.) The marketing plan should include the following:

1. Title of film, genre, name of production companies, name of director, date of release.
2. Film summary/synopsis
3. Credit list
4. JPEGs of film poster, select BTS stills, and other marketing and promotional images
5. Key Success Factors (of marketing and promotional campaign)
6. Marketing & Promotional Objectives
7. Marketing Performance & Activity Objectives
8. Target Audience Description
9. Genre-Defining Films (provide list of similar films that have been produced in the past, are currently available in the market, and/or are also in-development, in-production, or in post-production)
10. Audience Viewing Criteria (list the criteria that the film’s audience, particularly any criteria specific to the film’s genre, uses to select the films they purchase, rent, or view)
11. List of specific marketing and promotional channels (name of websites, publications, events, etc.)
12. List of Promotional Activities
13. Supplemental Documents/Information (the student should include a simple marketing calendar and any additional information or documents he/she feels would be relevant).