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# Collaboration with an International Film Sales Agent

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# Introduction

The profession of film sales agents has long been surrounded by misconceptions, particularly within the Polish film industry. Some of these misunderstandings stem from the shared, sometimes difficult, experiences of collaborating with international agents, while others arise from a lack of awareness or underestimation of the agent's role in a film's success. In many cases, these myths have developed simply because of the absence of accessible, reliable information about this highly specialised profession, which is practised by only a small number of individuals.

A decade ago, the role of a sales agent was virtually unknown in Poland, with only a handful of Polish filmmakers and producers working with international agents. However, this landscape has changed significantly, largely thanks to the greater visibility and promotion of the profession, as well as the success of Polish films at international festivals, where their commercial potential was recognised. Equally important has been the work of New Europe Film Sales, a company that has represented both Polish and international films, playing a key role in reshaping the perception of sales agents in Poland and making their contributions better understood.

The outdated stereotype of agents merely jet-setting around the world and attending festivals is gradually disappearing. As awareness grows about the evolving market and the critical role that sales agents play, their value is becoming increasingly recognised. We hope that this publication offers a deeper insight into the profession, shedding light on the methods and practices that define the work of a film sales agent.

# 1. What is a Sales Agent?

Let's begin by addressing the question, 'What exactly is a sales agent?'. The answer to this is crucial for understanding the dynamics between a producer and an agent. Official definitions of a sales agent's role can be surprisingly elusive, and a quick online search often fails to provide clear or accurate explanations. Interestingly, while a simple Google search may fall short, tools like ChatGPT can offer a fairly decent overview of the role. The key, however, lies in asking the right question—if you simply look up 'sales agents' (without specifying film) or 'film agents' (without specifying sales), you won't land on the correct information. This only goes to show just how specific the role of a film sales agent really is.

To fully understand what a sales agent does, it helps to first clarify what they are not.

## Film Sales Agent Isn't a Talent Agent

A film sales agent is distinct from a talent manager or agent. When we think of an 'agent,' we often imagine someone or a company representing a creative individual in the business world—someone who negotiates contracts and seeks business opportunities for that person. In essence, a sales agent's role is similar, but with a key difference: the 'product' they represent is not the creator or producer, but a specific film.

Frequently, agents build long-term relationships with producers or directors, with the same agent representing multiple films by a given creator. However, this continuity is driven not by long-term contracts but by the agent's success and the strength of the professional relationship. Contracts are signed on a film-by-film basis, rather than locking the creator or production company into long-term agreements.

Moreover, a sales agent's role often goes beyond promoting a single film. They may also assist in building the director's brand or supporting their visibility in the international market. However, these activities are typically seen as 'additional' services, meant to enhance the film's success or as an investment in future collaborations, rather than being explicitly defined within the contract.

## Film Sales Agent Is Not a Distributor

The role of a film distributor is generally more familiar and easier to understand within the film industry, especially when compared to the role of a sales agent. This is because, while not every film requires the involvement of a sales agent, nearly every film seeks to secure a distributor to bring it to cinemas. When we refer to a distributor, we typically mean the entity holding the rights to distribute a film within a specific territory. The distributor is responsible for promoting the film in that region, arranging deals with cinemas, local television channels, or VOD platforms, and ultimately ensuring that the film reaches its audience.

If we examine the definition of film distribution in the Cinematography Act<sup>1</sup>, which states that 'distribution of a film means acquiring the right to exploit a film, including making copies and adapting it into another language version, and transferring this right to other entities for the purpose of dissemination,' we might be tempted to think that many of these responsibilities also apply to a sales agent. This could suggest that a sales agent functions as a type of distributor—but that's not entirely accurate.

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<sup>1</sup> Dz. U. 2005 Nr 132 poz. 1111 z późn. zm. Art. 5.pkt.1

Sales agents are often referred to as ‘international distributors,’ and while this description fits in some ways, those working in the international film industry understand the term differently. An ‘international distributor’ usually refers to a company that releases a film in cinemas (and today, through various platforms) across multiple territories, rather than one that finds local distributors in each territory.

In the chain from producer to viewer, a sales agent sits one step before the distributor. To illustrate, let’s use a simplified model where the viewer watches the film in a cinema. The path to the viewer would look like this:

**Producer -> Sales Agent -> Distributor -> Cinema -> Viewer**

However, a sales agent typically does not operate in the film’s country of production. In most cases, local producers are well-versed in their domestic market and can negotiate and sign deals with local distributors themselves. The sales agent steps in as the intermediary for distribution in all other countries. As a result, the relationship between the agent and distributor can branch out into numerous additional local distributors across various territories outside the country of production.

## Film Sales Agent Is an Intermediary

The sales agent is often described as an intermediary between the producer and distributors around the world, and this remains perhaps the most fitting definition of the role to this day. However, it’s important to recognise that the previous model is a simplification. A sales agent works with numerous local distributors, and beyond traditional theatrical distribution, they also operate across various other avenues of exploitation. This means the agent’s network often extends to:

- Distributors
- Film festivals
- VOD platforms
- Television channels
- Airlines
- Libraries
- Cinemas
- And other venues hosting special screenings or film showcases

At first glance, it may seem that the sales agent is somewhat distanced from the end viewer. In fact, there’s usually more than one institution between the agent and the viewer—for instance, not just a cinema, but often both a cinema and a distributor. From the producer’s perspective, we find ourselves further from the international audience than the sales agent.

Benjamin and Daniela Cölle from Pluto Film provided insight into the profession in an interview with Cineuropa, stating<sup>2</sup>:

***As sales agents, we do much more than simply sell films; we act as a crucial link across all stages of a film's production and distribution, particularly when it comes to artistic or politically challenging films. Our role is to take a film from a local context to an international stage, giving it a global reach. This is why our goal is to foster collaboration. [...] In recent years, we've been moving towards the American model, becoming more like talent agencies. We are increasingly involved from the early stages of production, helping films gain visibility and working with talents, including directors and stars.***

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cineuropa.org/en/interview/453615/>



## 2. Does Your Film Need a Sales Agent?

With the growing recognition of the sales agent's role in the Polish film industry, there has been a noticeable shift in perception, from the belief that 'agents are unnecessary' to the idea that 'agents are essential.' However, the reality lies somewhere between these two extremes. Not every film will benefit from the involvement of a sales agent, and some may even struggle to secure one. It's worth exploring exactly what a sales agent brings to a project, how they can assist with a film's journey, and in what situations their involvement adds the most value.

### Finding a Sales Agent Isn't Easy

Each year, Europe produces around 2,000 films<sup>3</sup>, while the Cannes Film Festival, across all its sections, offers only about 100 film slots annually. Given that a year has 52 weeks, if we were to assume that every film selected for Cannes also received a theatrical release in Poland, we would need to watch two Cannes films every week. And this doesn't even account for films from other festivals.

The film market is highly competitive, and just as it can be difficult to secure cinema slots or festival placements, finding a sales agent can be equally challenging. Agents base their business on how many distribution opportunities they can secure for a film, so investing in a new project always involves a financial risk from their side [more on this in the chapter 'How Do Sales Agents Earn'].

The good news is that it's not just producers seeking out agents—agents are also on the lookout for promising films. They attend festivals, even smaller industry events, and monitor competitions, film schools, and development programs. For producers, the key is to make the most of these opportunities and think long-term, planning not just for the immediate project, but for their future career and that of the director.

### Does Every Film Have International Potential?

The first step in the search for a sales agent is to ask whether the film in question has international appeal. Not every film is destined for festival circuits, global cinema screenings, or international distribution channels. Some films simply aren't suited to international markets, and this doesn't mean they are in any way lesser; in fact, they are often made with entirely different goals in mind. For example, local comedies rooted in the specific cultural or political landscape of a country may perform exceptionally well in domestic cinemas or on local television without the expectation of being showcased at international festivals. Such films may not need the support of a sales agent (or they may need it on a much smaller scale, perhaps only to sell rights for local remakes), particularly in the context we are focusing on here.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/2023-press-releases/-/asset\\_publisher/0t9kVBabnl8V/content/gbo-in-the-eu-and-the-uk-grew-by-70-in-2022-but-fell-short-of-pre-pandemic-average-by-28-1](https://www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/2023-press-releases/-/asset_publisher/0t9kVBabnl8V/content/gbo-in-the-eu-and-the-uk-grew-by-70-in-2022-but-fell-short-of-pre-pandemic-average-by-28-1)

## Will a Sales Agent Guarantee Success for My Film?

The straightforward answer is—maybe. Sales agents have access to a broad network of contacts, relationships, and influence—both direct and indirect—within the film industry. However, is the ultimate aim to find a sales agent who will be a magic solution to the question of ‘what happens next with my film?’ Certainly not. The success of a film’s promotion and international journey depends on a multitude of people and factors. Whether a programmer at Cannes or a selector at Berlinale takes an interest in the film can play a critical role in its trajectory.

The film industry doesn’t operate on a simple yes/no basis; often, human factors influence decisions. A viewer’s mood, the atmosphere at a screening, the setting, or even who they are watching the film with can affect their experience. Of course, professional selectors, agents, and distributors are trained to evaluate films objectively, but we cannot (and perhaps wouldn’t want to) eliminate the human factor entirely. As a result, even with the best sales agent and the most professional support, a film might still fall short of expectations due to unforeseeable circumstances. However, having a sales agent undoubtedly increases the film’s chances, offering alternative strategies, insights, and experience to help navigate the complex international market.

***LevelK is an international film sales agency based in Copenhagen. We are rooted in Nordic values such as trust, transparency, equality, and freedom of speech. Therefore, we apply a carefully tailored, individual sales, marketing, and festival strategy for each of our titles. Our best advice for producers is to be open to collaboration and to understand that the sales agent’s role is to help your film reach its audience. Our network of contacts and understanding of the market and positioning can determine whether the film gets noticed by the right distributors and/or festivals.***

— LevelK

# 3. How to Effectively Find a Sales Agent for Your Project

Finding the right agent for a film is a complex process. Thorough preparation for this task can assist us both in the initial stages of the search and in subsequent discussions about potentially collaborating on the project.

***Find the right moment to share your script—most sales companies won't have the time to read it twice!***

— Pamela Leu, Be for Films

## 1. Research

Much like any other pursuit, the search for a sales agent begins with thorough analysis. With dozens of firms operating across Europe, it can be difficult to make an informed choice without a clear understanding of their specialisations. Sales agents differ in size, approach, and focus—some may represent large companies with wide networks and extensive portfolios, while others work in smaller agencies with a more niche or boutique offering. Each company has its own unique working style, different types of films they focus on, and specific sales strategies. As a result, the range of services an agent provides can vary considerably.

Therefore, the first step in the search for an agent should always be research. This involves identifying the specialisations of various firms and gaining insight into how they are perceived within the industry. Speaking directly with industry professionals, attending events where agents gather (such as international festivals and film markets), and having open conversations with filmmakers who have worked with them can all be effective strategies. Additionally, there are several publicly available tools and resources that can help you verify agents and their track records.

Engaging in this level of research ensures that you not only find an agent who aligns with your film's needs but also understand their approach and what they can realistically offer. The key is not simply finding an agent but finding the *right* agent whose expertise and network can bring the most value to your project.

### European Film Promotion - Sales Agents List

European Film Promotion (EFP) is an organisation that connects film institutes from across Europe, working to enhance the international distribution of European films. One of its key initiatives is the publication of an annual catalogue of European sales agents that collaborate with the institution. This catalogue is an invaluable resource for filmmakers seeking to engage with agents, as it offers comprehensive information on companies, highlights key films they've represented in recent years, and provides contact details for the agents themselves. Since many of the agents listed receive financial support from EFP, this catalogue serves as one of the most thorough guides to European sales agents available.

Explore the EFP website here: [European Film Promotion](#)

Access the EFP Catalogue here: [European Film Promotion Catalogue](#)

## Europa International

Another essential organisation is Europa International, a network of European sales agents. Their website hosts information about 50 member companies from 12 countries. While the site doesn't provide detailed descriptions or specialisations of these firms, it does offer direct links to their websites and contact details for key employees. This makes it a useful starting point for reaching out to agents, even if their contact details aren't readily available on their own websites.

*Explore Europa International Members here:* **Europa International**

## Cinando

Often dubbed the 'LinkedIn of the film industry,' Cinando is a comprehensive database of films, companies, and professionals in the film world. Closely associated with the Marché du Film at the Cannes Film Festival, Cinando provides access to an extensive network of industry contacts and projects. Anyone accredited at Cannes receives a profile and access to the platform for a year, ensuring that almost every active professional in the industry can be found there. Cinando is a powerful tool not only for connecting with agents but also for researching company specialisations and tracking the types of films they work on. Users can explore company profiles, check the films in their portfolios, and easily identify the sales agents, distributors, and festivals associated with specific films.

*Learn more about Cinando here:* **Cinando**

## Festival and Market Catalogues

Another useful approach is to look at catalogues published by major festivals, especially those featuring films similar to the one you're seeking representation for. Festivals like Berlinale or New Horizons often release catalogues detailing the rights holders for each film in various territories, which allows you to identify which agents are working on projects that align with your own. Similarly, film markets (like those in Berlin or Venice) provide catalogues that list not only the films and companies represented but also contact information for key personnel. These directories are invaluable for initiating conversations and meetings with sales agents and other industry professionals.

Additionally, smaller co-production markets may offer more niche catalogues, which, though less comprehensive, are often easier to navigate and can be highly useful for more targeted research.

## International Trade Press<sup>4</sup>

When searching for an agent for your film, it's essential to pay attention to two key types of trade articles: acquisition announcements and sales announcements. **Acquisition announcements** inform readers when a film has been added to a specific agent's catalogue, while **sales announcements** detail international distributors that have purchased films from that agent. Monitoring these articles can help answer crucial questions such as:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://variety.com/>  
<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/>  
<https://www.screendaily.com/>  
<https://cineuropa.org/>  
<https://deadline.com/v/film/>

- Does this agent represent films that resonate with me?
- Are the films they manage being sold successfully?
- Do the distributors associated with this agency align with my collaboration goals?

Although you may not always be familiar with the distribution companies to which rights have been sold, examining the distributors in Poland that the agent works with can provide valuable insights into the types of films and companies they represent.

## Agents' Websites

It's vital not to overlook the websites of sales agents themselves. These platforms often showcase the films the company represents, as well as additional activities such as promotional materials and thumbnail images of posters. When visiting an agent's website, envision how your film's promotional poster might appear alongside their current catalogue and assess whether your project would fit seamlessly into their offerings.

The same considerations apply to social media profiles. Check how the agent presents their films online, and consider whether you'd be comfortable having your project featured on such platforms. This can give you a clearer sense of the agency's brand and audience engagement.

## Networking and Contacts

While the film industry may seem vast, it's often smaller than it appears. While not everyone knows each other, a few strategic phone calls or connections can lead you to the right individuals. Engaging in conversations, asking questions, seeking introductions, and actively listening to feedback can open doors. There's a strong possibility that someone within your network knows someone who has previously collaborated with a particular agent, and they may be able to provide an introduction or share their experiences working with that agency.

Never underestimate the power of networking, especially in the film industry. Building relationships can often be the key to finding the right sales agent for your project.

## 2. Film Pitch

A critical aspect of engaging with sales agents is how well you position your film within the market. Articulating your film's essence effectively is vital—not just by narrating the story, but also by referencing comparable films that can help the agent assess your production's potential. Keep in mind that the initial pitch is brief; ideally, it should fit within a ten-minute window at a festival. Often, you may need to convey key information through a booklet, treatment, or even an email.

To maximise the impact of your presentation, ensure your materials clearly communicate your film's unique values and potential. You want to help the agent visualise the project they will be championing once it's ready for release. Utilising benchmarks—collections of similar films—can significantly enhance your pitch. Consider these guiding questions to frame your communication with the agent:

- What is my story about?
- What type of film is this? What is its style and genre?
- What distinguishes my film from others?
- Why should someone take notice of my film?
- What comparable films can I cite to illustrate my project in terms of:
  - Genre, style, and themes
  - The director or actors involved (be sure to provide specific works they've participated in)
  - The overall mood of the film
  - Anticipated festivals where the film might be featured

### 3. Key Questions and Answers

Before meeting with a sales agent, it's important to carefully consider the purpose of the meeting. Preparing for the questions you may encounter during the conversation can help you convey your intentions clearly:

- Are we seeking an agent for funding, to close the budget, or for substantive support, or are we thinking more long-term?
- What stage of production are we currently at, and when will the film be ready for its world premiere?
- Are we looking to sign a contract with the agent now, or are we simply aiming to raise awareness of our film within the industry?
- What level of support do we have from film institutions and public funding bodies?
- Which territories are available for distribution, and will any need to be excluded from a potential agreement?
- Who is responsible for decision-making regarding sales? Is it the lead producer, or is it a collective decision among co-producers?
- What are the director's priorities for the film?
- What are our own priorities concerning the film? If we had to choose between financial gain [e.g., a deal with a global platform] and building recognition [e.g., festival circulation], would we know which is more important to us?

### 4. Co-production Markets and Pitching Sessions

When we are prepared to engage with potential agents, selecting the right moment to present our film to the industry is crucial. Sales agents actively monitor script competitions, co-production markets, and pitching sessions that accompany many festivals. They travel extensively to stay informed about projects currently in development and to scout for films that could fit into their catalogues in the future.

Co-production markets and pitching events offer excellent opportunities to begin establishing relationships with agents. These events often include one-on-one meetings, allowing us to connect with industry representatives and discuss our film in detail. We should not be disheartened if a single session or pitch does not immediately result in securing an agent. Instead, we should view these interactions as starting points and opportunities to leave a lasting impression on the agents we meet.

## 5. Building Relationships and Negotiating

When engaging with sales agents, we should focus not only on the company we are communicating with and its area of expertise but also on the individual we are interacting with and how we establish rapport with them. If possible, we should seek feedback from those who have previously collaborated with them. The relationship between an agent and a producer is often very close; there are occasions when we may communicate daily over many years, celebrating successes together while also navigating setbacks and resolving crises. It is vital to ensure that the agent we choose to sign a contract with will be a true partner, sharing our vision and working alongside us.

## 4. Scope of Collaboration – Roles of the Agent, Producer, and Distributor

The agent occupies a central position in the collaborative dynamic between the producer and the distributor, excluding the country of production. While all parties share the same objective—reaching audiences and maximising profits from the film (as a film’s earnings benefit the distributor, agent, and producer alike)—their strategies for achieving this goal can vary significantly. The agent’s role is to ensure effective communication and foster understanding between the producer and distributor, often managing the expectations and requirements of both sides. For the distributor, essential materials may include documents or stills from the film that the producer may possess (or may not), while the producer may require distribution reports from specific countries that reside with the distributor. Since everyone is working towards a common goal, various tasks arise that are important to each party. How should responsibilities be divided, and what are the specific accountabilities of the producer and distributor? What responsibilities remain within the agent’s purview?

### Sales Agent’s Collaboration with the Producer

***The most vital aspect of a healthy relationship between the producer and the sales agent is transparency and honesty. These collaborations typically span from seven to fifteen years, or even longer; thus, it is crucial that partners can trust one another. Naturally, this mutual trust extends to the handling of criticism and differing opinions. Producers should feel the sales agent’s passion for the film and understand their strategy for achieving success.***

— Gabor Greiner, Films Boutique

The collaboration between the agent and the producer fundamentally aims towards the same goal. If, at the outset of the partnership, shared objectives and plans for the film are established, and the situation does not drastically change, it is essential to remember that even in the face of disagreements, both parties desire the same outcome. This understanding is vital, as the rules governing the producer’s responsibilities and the agent’s accountabilities can evolve over time.

In this collaboration, general guidelines are typically established: the producer is responsible for delivering the film and all necessary materials, while the agent is responsible for further sales of the film. However, in practical market scenarios, this division is not always straightforward, and grey areas often emerge. For instance, what should happen if the producer is tasked with delivering the film trailer, but the trailer is deemed unsuitable for international promotion among distributors? This situation is not uncommon, as films are rarely marketed in the same way in the country of production as they are abroad. Should the agent utilise this trailer, or should they produce a new one (which is usually the producer’s or the distributor’s responsibility in that territory)? Clearly, in such instances, the producer and agent must make decisions together, prioritising what is best for the film.

The same principles apply to other materials or to covering the costs associated with the film’s world premiere. Most often, the collaboration on a film is very close-knit, and it is rare for a producer to simply hand over a film to an agent and subsequently disengage from its international ‘life.’ Ideally, both parties would evaluate each other’s capabilities and divide the work in a way that optimises the film’s potential.



## Sales Agent's Collaboration with the Distributor

***The sales agent maintains constant communication with distributors around the world, engaging in both personal meetings at various trade fairs throughout the year and direct correspondence with distributors between these events. As a result, the sales agent often serves as a kind of curator for distributors. Each sales agency has its unique profile, just as distributors do. Finding the right sales agent for your project is crucial, as the collaboration between the sales agent and the producer significantly impacts the film's success.***

— The Match Factory

The collaboration between the sales agent and the distributor is built on mutual trust. The agent trusts that the distributor knows how to effectively market the film to audiences, identify the best strategies for its release in their territory, and manage promotional expenses sensibly—balancing adequate investment with careful oversight. While this trust is partially formalised through a signed contract, handing the film over to the distributor necessitates confidence that both the agent and the producer have identified a suitable custodian for the film in that market.

The trust the distributor places in the agent is more complex. Agents and distributors develop long-term relationships, and while selling a film to a specific distributor is never guaranteed, the agent's main role is to persuade distributors to take notice of the film and dedicate two hours of their valuable time at a festival in Cannes or Berlin to view the agent's latest catalogue. These two hours must be underpinned by the understanding that the agent will not present the distributor with a film that does not fit their catalogue or one that audiences are unlikely to engage with. This ability to match the right film to the right distributor demonstrates the agent's insight into the distributor's needs and their expertise in selecting suitable projects. Such insights come from years of experience and familiarity, forged through countless conversations at festivals and via email. In addition to distributors, agents also cultivate relationships with festival selectors, television buyers, and airlines.

As the collaboration progresses, the agent is responsible for confirming the materials that the distributor will use, providing them with necessary elements. The distributor, in turn, must ensure timely settlements with the agent and report profits. The agent also communicates and verifies this information with the producer. Ultimately, the distributor's task is to connect audiences with the film and generate profits, while the agent's role is to equip them with all the tools necessary to achieve this—often relying on materials supplied by the producer.

The relationship between the sales agent and the film distributor in the country of production can differ significantly. At first glance, they may seem like entirely independent entities, often unbound by contracts, and working with the same film in different ways. Particularly in today's increasingly virtual landscape, synchronising strategies across all distribution markets—both domestic and international—is becoming more crucial than ever.

## MEDIA Funding - Films on the Move

In recent years, following changes to the financing of international film promotion under the Films on the Move scheme of the Creative Europe programme, sales agents have taken on a crucial new role. They are now responsible for coordinating funding for the promotion of films to international distributors. According to the Creative Europe website:

***Funding can be applied for by a company that is a European (registered and operating in one of the MEDIA component countries and run by a citizen of one of those countries) sales agent specialising in the commercial exploitation of film through marketing and the sale of licences to distributors or other companies introducing the film abroad. The sales agent must also have a signed international sales agreement ensuring the rights to sell the film to at least 15 countries participating in MEDIA.<sup>5</sup>***

What does this mean in practice? The application for funding from distributors in Europe is submitted directly by the film's sales agent. They are responsible for allocating funds among the distributors and for settling accounts with the European Commission. This role aligns naturally with the agent's existing responsibilities, which include liaising with distributors about financial and promotional aspects of the film, approving strategies and promotional materials, as well as managing costs related to P&A (Prints and Advertising—i.e., the costs associated with marketing and servicing the film).

While the changes in the MEDIA programme have facilitated international cooperation among distributors and enhanced transparency in the distributor-agent and agent-producer relationships, they have also imposed additional responsibilities on agents. It is important to note that distributors cannot access this funding for a film without an agent serving as the coordinator and intermediary.

In recent years, the Films on the Move funding has supported Polish films such as<sup>6</sup>:

- ***Chłopi*** [Eng. *The Peasants*, directed by DK Welchman, Hugh Welchman] - €822,404.88
- ***Zielona Granica*** [Eng. *Green Border*, directed by Agnieszka Holland] - €804,448.79
- ***Żeby nie było śladów*** [Eng. *Leave No Traces*, directed by Jan P. Matuszyński] - €316,625.73

<sup>5</sup> <https://kreatywna-europa.eu/aplikacje/films-on-the-move/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-results?isExactMatch=true&order=DESC&pageNumber=1&pageSize=10&sortBy=title>

## 5. What Do Sales Agents Do, and What Don't They Do?

The primary role of a sales agent is to sell the film. Most of their activities will therefore revolve around negotiations with distributors. However, it often happens that, in order to reach these distributors, the agent must take on a number of tasks that are not directly part of their core responsibility of selling the film. Within sales agencies, you'll often find roles such as festival coordinator, marketing and promotion manager, or technical staff responsible for materials. These additional tasks arise because there may be no one else on the film team who can handle these responsibilities, or because no one with the necessary international market expertise is available to make these efforts beneficial to the agent. Without such materials and additional work, the agent wouldn't be able to perform their role effectively.

It's important to note that these supporting activities are usually not part of the agent's formal contractual obligations; rather, they help them fulfil their main responsibilities. In many cases, the contract places the responsibility for these tasks on the producer. Depending on the sales agency, some agents may take on these additional duties, while others may not. However, the core responsibility of the agent remains the same: to connect the film with the appropriate local distributors.

***Think about marketing in advance, even while filming. Sales companies often struggle with promotional materials. They need to work on them well before the official poster is ready for the premiere, so the more elements you can provide, the better. Don't limit yourself to five promotional stills; distributors will need more resources to create their own marketing materials.***

— Pamela Leu, Be for Films

### Development

Thanks to their extensive network within the international film industry, sales agents can offer valuable support during a project's development phase. This assistance may include helping to identify international partners, such as co-producers or funding bodies, advising on suitable co-production markets and pitching sessions, and even assisting with specific funding applications. For larger projects, agents may begin to secure pre-sales—selling the film before production is completed. However, for non-English language films or those lacking internationally renowned talent, achieving pre-sales at such an early stage can be quite challenging. In fact, simply signing a contract with a sales agent can sometimes pose difficulties.

## Production and Post-production

***Tip: Ensure that you plan and prepare promotional materials (photos, posters, videos, etc.) before filming begins, rather than waiting until the film is completed.***

— Level K

When a sales agent is involved during production, they typically use this time to lay the groundwork for the film's future promotion. This could mean taking part in developing the marketing plan, drafting a brief for the on-set photographer, or collaborating with the producer on promotional materials and photo shoots. They might also offer feedback on the script or edit to boost the film's appeal internationally and provide a fresh, external perspective on the project.

At this stage, the agent may also begin conversations with international distributors, using materials like the script, teaser, or specially-made promo clips. Sometimes, they'll organise private screenings of the film. The agent also helps to identify the best co-production markets and pitch sessions, creates the film's sales and promotional strategy, and starts discussions with international film festivals about the world premiere. As the premiere approaches, regular communication between the agent and producer becomes vital, ensuring a consistent message about the film is shared with everyone involved.

## World Premiere

***Have a broad understanding of the international festival circuit; avoid narrowing your focus to just the Cannes Film Festival—only a handful of films will be selected to screen there. Your sales agent's role is to collaborate with you and the director to develop the optimal festival strategy and launch for your film.***

— Pamela Leu, Be for Films

The world premiere represents the most pivotal moment in a film's lifecycle from the perspective of a sales agent. This is when the industry becomes most aware of the film, boosting the chances of reviews in international press and marking the culmination of promotional and marketing campaigns, which generate buzz that significantly influences the film's reception in the industry. Just as each sales agent has their own reputation, so too do festivals; participation in a specific event is vital for how the film will be perceived by other industry representatives, including festivals, distributors, cinema owners, and even the audience.

Consequently, it is often at the world premiere that the largest portion of the P&A (Prints and Advertising) budget is allocated, with the most investment directed towards promotional activities and the release of film-related materials—such as posters, trailers, and stills.

Sales agents frequently work alongside publicists to arrange private screenings for the press and international distributors, as well as to coordinate print and social media advertisements and organise related events. While an agent may assist the film's delegation in coordinating their travel for the premiere, this is not always

guaranteed. Most activities surrounding the world premiere are typically organised in consultation between the producer and the sales agent, potentially involving the local distributor in the country of the premiere (e.g., a French distributor during the Cannes festival), along with support from film institutes in the countries of production. The world premiere is also frequently used to generate valuable materials, such as interviews with journalists from various countries, coverage of the premiere, and photos of the crew.

## Distribution Stage

Once the world premiere has taken place, the agent's key role shifts to driving further sales of the film and engaging in discussions with distributors. If contracts covering all fields of exploitation haven't been finalised, the agent will need to pursue additional sales opportunities and regularly reassess the sales strategy for the film. They are also responsible for navigating the film's festival circuit and negotiating agreements with entities like television stations or airlines. A vital part of the agent's responsibilities at this stage involves ensuring that the terms of contracts with distributors are adhered to. This includes approving promotional plans and budgets, as well as gathering sales reports from the distributors. While not always explicitly stated in the contract, the agent may also take part in promoting the film during award campaigns, such as the European Film Awards or the Oscars.

It's clear that a significant portion of the agent's duties during the sales process is concentrated towards the end of production, during the world premiere, and in monitoring the fulfilment of contracts by distributors. However, agents often dedicate considerable time and resources to properly prepare films for these stages, which results in their involvement in a variety of related activities. This overview is, of course, a simplification, primarily focusing on non-English language art-house films with distribution potential that lack internationally renowned names or seasoned directors. In different scenarios, the agent's actions may differ and ramp up at various points in the process. For example, with English-language films or those featuring well-known actors, increased sales activities might take place during the development stage or in early production.

## 6. Timeline of the Collaboration

A sales agent can decide to collaborate with a producer at any stage of a film's development, although it typically happens no later than about a month before the world premiere. From the agent's perspective, the world premiere represents the most significant moment in a film's life, and it's essential for the agent to prepare accordingly. If they join the project later, their chances of achieving effective sales and making a meaningful impact on the film's international journey drop sharply. The collaboration generally lasts from the moment the contract is signed and can extend for several years after the film's release.

Typically, the year following the premiere is a time of intense activity surrounding the film—sales, festival participation, and award campaigns. This period often sees the highest number of contracts being signed (those not previously secured during the pre-sales phase). After the first year, the agent's work tends to be more situational or reactive, with bursts of activity during special events and quieter times when nothing significant is happening around the film. Peaks of activity can be triggered by political events or the release of another film by the same director. Contracts are usually signed for several years, often with automatic renewals.

A more complex issue arises at the start of the film's production. Once the contract is signed, the agent should be actively involved in the film's development. However, not all films are suited for pre-sales activities, so signing an agreement with the agent early on doesn't necessarily mean they will start active sales efforts before the premiere. This is often the case for larger films featuring well-known casts or crews.

Agents are sometimes hesitant to sign contracts with producers at an early stage. It's easier if the agent has an established relationship with the producer or director; however, it can be more challenging if it's a debut film, if it hasn't participated in prestigious development programmes, or if it's primarily backed by lesser-known names. It's often advisable to wait until the agent can view a rough cut of the film before signing an agreement. This ensures they are fully aware of what to expect during the film's promotional activities. It's always a matter of balancing budget closure, the desire to find the ideal partner, and the current market situation.

***I prefer to start working on films during the rough cut stage, when they are nearly finished. This allows us to know precisely what we will be working with. Of course, we always conduct scouting. I can confidently say that at least half of the films we choose each year are selected at the script stage, especially if they are projects from directors we have previously collaborated with.<sup>7</sup>***

— Jan Naszewski, New Europe Film Sales

<sup>7</sup> <https://cineuropa.org/en/interview/448038/>

## 7. Costs – Promotion Budget and Agent’s Fees

### How Do Sales Agents Earn?

Generally speaking, a sales agent earns a percentage of the film’s profits that they manage to generate. Of course, there are exceptions, such as agencies that work for a fixed fee or take advance payments (where the producer pays the agency a set amount to develop a strategy, promote the film, negotiate with distributors, or coordinate festival participation). This model is more common with short films or documentaries, but it is rarely used in feature films. This means that for full-length films, you typically don’t pay the agent upfront. However, this doesn’t mean the agent is working for free—contracts clearly outline how the agent’s commission will be taken from the profits due to the producer, and sometimes there’s an additional fee involved.

Signing a contract with a producer to sell a film is almost always an investment on the part of the agent. First, there’s no guarantee the film will sell. Moreover, the agent is investing not only their time but also their own money into promoting the film. These costs can vary depending on the agreement and the specific needs of the film. The expenses are always recovered from the film’s earnings (eventually paid by the producer but without needing to cover the costs as they arise). These expenses are known as the P&A—Promotion and Advertising—costs. Additionally, the agent may offer an MG—Minimum Guarantee—which is essentially an advance on the future profits, though this isn’t always the case.

To sum up: while you don’t pay the agent directly in cash for working on your film, the costs they incur and their commission are paid later by the producer. It’s the agent who takes the financial risk and makes the initial investment. If there’s any financial transaction between the producer and the agent when the contract is signed, it’s usually the agent paying the producer. In return, the producer typically grants the agent the exclusive right to handle the licensing and sales of the film.

### Negotiating a Contract with a Sales Agent

When negotiating a contract with a sales agent, there are three key aspects to focus on, which can be adjustable and are often negotiable depending on the specific project.

### Minimum Guarantee (MG)

The Minimum Guarantee (MG) is an advance paid by the agent to the producer (and similarly by the distributor to the agent). It’s paid at the start of the collaboration and is often mistakenly seen by producers as ‘payment for rights.’ In reality, MG is simply a guaranteed minimum sum that the agent pays the producer upfront, regardless of how much the film earns in the future. Once the film starts generating income, the MG amount is deducted from the producer’s share of the profits and recouped by the agent—this usually happens after the agent has recovered the Promotion and Advertising (P&A) costs, and always from the producer’s share (after the agent’s commission has been deducted from the profits).

**Example:** Let’s assume there are no P&A costs. The agent pays the producer €10,000 in MG. The agent’s commission is 20%. The film sells for €5,000—of this, €1,000 is the agent’s fee, and €4,000 is the producer’s share. However, the agent does not pay the producer the €4,000, as this amount was already advanced through the MG. The agent retains it, leaving €6,000 of the MG still to be recouped. The producer will start receiving

revenue only after the film generates at least €12,500, at which point the MG is fully recouped, and for every €1 earned thereafter, the agent will pay the producer €0.80.

It's not uncommon for films to struggle to earn enough beyond the MG to generate any additional profit for the producer. This has led to the industry simplification where MG is often thought of as 'payment for rights.' However, it's important to remember that this isn't accurate. The idea behind MG is that the future potential of the film is unknown—agents and distributors estimate and take a risk by paying the MG, but if they underestimate and the film performs better, the additional profits still go to the producer. The opposite of an MG deal is a **fixed fee**, where a single payment is made for the rights to the film. In this case, no further revenue is paid to the producer, regardless of how well the film performs or how widely it is viewed. This is more common in sales to television networks or streaming platforms, but it's rare with agents and distributors, as future profits are much harder to predict.

You can negotiate the MG in your contract with an agent—it may or may not be included. If it's not included, you may start seeing returns from the film as soon as the agent secures the first sales contract. The MG can vary in size and can also be paid in instalments, especially in contracts signed during the early stages of production. In such cases, the MG isn't paid upfront but is divided into tranches, tied to milestones in the production process. MG can therefore be part of your production budget or your first profit if the budget is already covered by the time you're looking for an agent. You can also choose to forego the MG in exchange for a lower commission fee for the agent.

***For the right project, we are able to offer a significant Minimum Guarantee (MG). For us, it's not just about the money. We also aim to actively engage with the project, offering what it needs in terms of networking and attracting co-production partners.<sup>8</sup>***

— Jan Naszewski, New Europe Film Sales

## Profit Share Percentage

Sales agents operate under various models, and the percentage they take for their work can vary widely. Typically, this ranges between 15% and 35%, though there are exceptions beyond these figures. Many agents offer different percentages depending on the type of rights being dealt with. For instance, a higher percentage is often taken for festival screenings (with 50% being the standard) and a lower percentage for global deals with VOD platforms. Therefore, the division of profits should be negotiated based on the specific rights the agent is granted to manage. It's also common for agents to take a set percentage from the initial sales of the film, with the percentage adjusting—either decreasing or increasing—once the film's earnings reach a certain threshold as outlined in the contract. While some of these conditions may be non-negotiable, it's worth discussing them if you're particularly keen on securing a higher minimum guarantee (MG) or reducing the agent's commission.

<sup>8</sup> <https://cineuropa.org/en/interview/448038/>



## P&A and Recoupment

P&A stands for Prints and Advertising, referring to the costs associated with distributing and promoting a film. In the traditional model of distribution, 'Prints' referred to the physical copies of the film sent to cinemas. Nowadays, in the age of digital distribution, it may refer to the creation of digital copies. 'Advertising' covers promotional expenses, including advertising campaigns, marketing materials (trailers, posters), and PR efforts like interviews and organising festival premieres. In a contract with a sales agent, P&A costs primarily relate to marketing and promotion. The contract should clearly define the types of expenses that qualify as P&A, along with the minimum amount the agent commits to spending on promotion and the maximum they can later claim back under the agreed terms. It's also a good idea to ensure you have oversight of these costs and planned expenditures. This helps prevent unpleasant surprises, such as discovering that no profits are due to the producer because the agent spent so much on promotion that the revenues haven't yet covered their outlay. Remember that P&A costs are often recouped first from the producer's share of the profits, so it's in the producer's best interest to keep these expenses balanced.

Examples of P&A costs can include, but are not limited to:

- Festival submissions;
- Production of posters, trailers, and other promotional materials, including music licensing for these materials;
- Production of special promos for distributors or additional content;
- Hiring a PR agency;
- Hiring a marketing agency;
- Advertising costs (in print, online, and other media);
- Costs for private industry and press screenings (including market screenings);
- Expenses related to the world premiere (event organisation, sometimes covering travel for the crew or actors);
- Technical costs, such as DCP production or additional formats not provided by the producer;
- Distribution of copies (including online distribution);
- Other costs directly related to the film.

P&A costs, particularly those incurred for the world premiere, can escalate quickly. Therefore, it's crucial to ensure close coordination between the producer and the sales agent, and to have a clear agreement on how these costs will be divided. When drafting the contract, it's important to define which costs can be included in the P&A budget (and to ensure that these costs relate directly to the promotion of your film, rather than general operational costs of the agent). Additionally, the contract should specify how the P&A costs will be recouped: will they be deducted evenly from the overall profits before the revenue is split between the agent and producer? Or will they only be recouped from the producer's share? Alternatively, the agent may be open to a different arrangement, such as paying the producer a percentage of the profits from the outset while recovering P&A costs only from a specific portion of the revenue.

These three elements—Minimum Guarantee (MG), the agent’s commission, and the amount and method of P&A recoupment—are often the primary focus of negotiations. While each agent has their own standard contract terms, if one of these aspects is particularly important to you, be prepared to make concessions on another. For instance, you might negotiate a higher MG, but this could come with a higher commission for the agent, or you may accept higher P&A costs, provided they are recovered solely from the producer’s profits.

Another point of negotiation can be the duration for which the agent holds the rights to licence your film. Typically, agents have the ability to sign deals extending beyond the initial contract period. For example, even if you have a three-year agreement with your agent, they can licence the film to someone else for 10 years. The contract term refers only to the time in which the agent has the authority to manage the film’s rights. Without such provisions, agents would be unable to do their job effectively. However, it’s important to note that when the contract expires, not all rights automatically revert back to the producer. Contracts with agents often include a so-called ‘rollover’ clause—if the contract is not terminated, it automatically extends for another period.

It’s also worth considering that the agent doesn’t always hold exclusive rights to sell the film’s licences. While this is typically the case, there are instances where only specific rights are granted to the agent. For example, the agent might handle only TV rights, or certain rights might be non-exclusive, allowing both the agent and the producer to submit the film to festivals. These special cases are more commonly seen with short films and documentaries.

## Who Covers the World Premiere Costs?

The costs associated with a world premiere can be staggering, and they are often overlooked in initial budgets. While producers don’t pay for festival screenings themselves, the associated expenses can escalate rapidly. A well-organised premiere at major festivals such as Berlin, Cannes, or Venice can cost upwards of €30,000, with no real upper limit. These costs include travel expenses for key crew members (festivals usually invite 2-3 people), additional industry screenings (which can cost up to €2,000 per screening), hiring a PR agency (ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of euros), booking advertisements (starting from around €1,000 on social media, with potentially limitless costs in trade magazines or at the festival itself), and creating essential promotional materials, such as posters and trailers, often used during the premiere.

Producers often don’t have the funds to cover all these expenses, and sales agents may be unwilling to cover certain premiere-related costs (such as expensive premiere events), or the expenses may exceed the agreed P&A budget.

Fortunately, for European films, local film institutes often provide financial support. These institutions have dedicated funds to assist with promotion during world premieres. For instance, the Polish Film Institute offers funding based on the festival where the film is screened, allowing producers to apply for a percentage of the promotional budget. However, this never covers 100% of the costs. The remaining expenses are usually split between the producer and the sales agent, with both parties sharing responsibility for managing the tasks according to their resources. Typically, the premiere planning team consists of a dedicated representative from the producer’s side, one from the sales agent’s side, and one from the international PR agency. In some cases, such as premieres at Cannes, the local distributor and sometimes a local PR agent also contribute both financially and organisationally.

## 8. Deliverables for the Sales Agent

Every sales agent will have their own list of so-called ‘deliverables’—the materials that the producer must provide to enable the agent to sell the film’s rights. The list of required deliverables is typically attached to the contract with the agent and can be quite extensive. This is because the agent must be prepared for every potential sale—television networks may need different materials than airlines, a distributor in Germany may require assets for dubbing the film, while a U.S. distributor might demand additional legal documentation.

The basic list of deliverables will always include the film’s masters, legal documents confirming rights, and materials needed for the film’s promotion (such as photos and information), and this list is generally non-negotiable. Sometimes, you can agree with the agent that certain items (for instance, the M&E track—soundtrack without dialogue) will only be produced if there’s a distribution need for it. If you are unable to produce additional masters, you must inform the agent, so they don’t waste time trying to sell the film in markets that would require those materials.

Some elements on the list (both technical and promotional, such as a poster) can be handled by the agent. Unless otherwise agreed, the producer typically bears the cost of these additional items (usually upfront, not as part of P&A expenses), since they are part of the agreed deliverables list in the contract. While promotional costs (like producing trailers or posters) can often be included in the P&A budget, technical costs are something agents are usually reluctant to cover.

***A sales agent needs materials and up-to-date information about the project from the producer in order to start promoting the film and later introduce it to international markets.***

— The Match Factory

Below is a simplified version of the deliverables list - different agents may require more or fewer materials.

1. Film Masters:
  - a. DCP [Digital Cinema Package].
  - b. ProRes files - in both 24 and 25 frame versions, with different audio formats [5.1 & Stereo].
  - c. M&E, DME Stems [if required].
  - d. Film screener, sometimes also required with a watermark.
  
2. Legal Documentation:
  - a. Music Cue Sheet.
  - b. Chain of Title.
  - c. Budget and financing information.
  - d. End credits.
  - e. E&O Insurance [if required].

3. Dialogue List:
  - a. Dialogue list with timecodes.
  - b. English subtitles.
  - c. Spotting list.
  - d. Technical Specifications.
  
4. Press Kit:
  - a. Synopsis: Short and long version.
  - b. Director's statement.
  - c. Cast and crew biographies and photos.
  - d. Production notes.
  - e. On-set and promotional photos.
  - f. Festival and awards information.
  
5. Promotional Materials:
  - a. High-quality stills (even 50-100 photos).
  - b. Trailer.
  - c. Poster.

## 9. Festivals and Markets

### What Is a World Premiere?

We should remember that a world premiere happens only once and is usually the focal point of the promotion for any film with international potential. The availability of premiere status (worldwide, international, regional) often determines a film's chances of being selected for film festivals. The definitions of premieres and their importance for festival selection are excellently described in the guide published by Europa International on best practices for collaboration between agents and distributors.<sup>9</sup>

Let's establish some key definitions without which navigating the world of festivals would be challenging:

**World Premiere** – This is the first public screening of a film in any country. It usually takes place at a film festival. Some festivals (such as the Venice Film Festival) require world premiere status to screen a film.

**International Premiere** – This refers to the first public screening of a film in a country other than the country of production. A film can have its world premiere in the country of production (e.g., a Polish film at the Gdynia Festival) and then an international premiere at a festival outside Poland. The status of an international premiere often helps to synchronise strategies between the country of production and foreign markets. However, great care should be taken with international premieres, and one should not assume that showing the film in its home country will not affect future international opportunities.

Although many festival regulations allow for international premiere status rather than world premiere status (such as Berlin or Cannes), it is often a formality used as an exception, and almost all selected films require world premiere status. Festival regulations often limit the number of screenings that can take place in the country of production—for example, no more than two festival screenings (this rule was in place for many years at the Sundance Festival). It can also happen that a film shown in its country of production but at a festival with international competition is treated as a film with international premiere status (like Karlovy Vary).

While there are exceptions, one should always assume that in order to screen a film at one of the major festivals, one must have available world premiere status. It's crucial to read festival regulations carefully, particularly the sections concerning premiere status and screenings prior to the festival.

**Regional Premiere** – This pertains to the screening of a film in a specific region, such as Europe, Asia, South America, or Central and Eastern Europe. It can occur after the world premiere but covers only one continent or a group of countries.

**National Premiere** – This refers to the first public screening of a film in a specific country.

**Market Screenings and Private Screenings** – In the context of premiere status, we always refer to the first public screening of a film. This means that screenings such as work-in-progress showings (provided they are private screenings), market screenings, or press screenings (which must be approached with caution due to additional rules, such as embargoes until the world premiere) are not considered public screenings. Thus, they are usually allowed and often organised before the world premiere. Such screenings generally cannot be publicly announced and usually have very strict access criteria.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.europa-international.org/projects/europa-international-europa-film-festivals-guide-of-good-practices-between-sales-and-festivals/>

**Example 1:** A Polish film has its world premiere at the Toronto Film Festival, which occurs in the first week of September. The film was previously shown at Polish Days during the New Horizons Festival in July, at a closed screening for industry professionals. Thus, the screening in Toronto will be the film's world premiere. The next screening will be in San Sebastian at the end of September, making it the European premiere. If the screening in Gdynia takes place after San Sebastian, it will be considered the Polish premiere. The film's first screening in the USA will be a national premiere there; however, it won't be a North American premiere since the world premiere occurred at the Toronto Festival.

**Example 2:** A Polish film premieres at the Gdynia Festival and is then qualified for one of the sidebar sections of the Berlin Festival in February. The Gdynia screening will serve as the world premiere, while the Berlin screening [assuming there are no prior showings] will be the international premiere. The film will then be showcased at New Directors New Films in New York in March, marking its North American premiere.

**NOTE:** A Polish film screened at Sundance (USA, January) and then in Berlin (February) will have its world premiere at Sundance and only a European premiere at Berlin. Conversely, an American film in the same situation will have its world premiere at Sundance and an international premiere in Berlin. Interestingly, from the perspective of Berlinale, the premiere status of an American film is often considered more prestigious than that of a Polish [European] film. This highlights the importance of carefully analysing each situation and the specific festival regulations. Just because American films frequently transition from Sundance to Berlin doesn't guarantee the same ease for European films.

## Grouping Festivals

In the world of film festivals and sales agents, we must be cautious when using the term 'Category A festivals'. In a formal sense, typically understood in academic circles, Category A festivals refer to a list of 14 festivals accredited by FIAPF that are considered competitive festivals. Unfortunately, this does not align with the industry's perspective. When someone from the industry, particularly a sales agent, refers to Category A festivals, they usually mean those that significantly impact the distribution potential of films.

Depending on the individual and the specialisation of the company they represent, this list may vary slightly. However, it will generally include five festivals: Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Toronto, and Sundance. Of these five, only three are on the FIAPF list; Toronto is accredited by FIAPF as a non-competitive festival, while Sundance is not accredited at all.

If we add approximately 15 other festivals to these five [some of which are on the FIAPF list], we will have a relatively comprehensive list of festivals where world premieres and screenings are significant from an agent's perspective. Another 50 to 100 festivals are recognisable; while selection at these festivals may not greatly impact the film's situation, their combination can create a substantial festival circuit and enhance the film's visibility.

Beyond these, we find good festivals that have excellent engagement with audiences and are influential in local markets, although they may not significantly affect a film's international standing. There are also specialised festivals, where the selection criteria will differ considerably depending on the specific film in question.

Unfortunately, there is no single universal list of festivals to pay attention to. The FIAPF list is one such resource. When compiling your own list and strategy, it's also worth considering festivals that offer opportunities for awards such as the European Film Awards or the Oscars (including lists for short films and documentaries), as well as those festivals that help secure funding from film institutes (e.g., Operational Programmes of the Polish Film Institute or the Danish Film Institute).<sup>10</sup>

## How Do International Film Markets Operate?

Film markets—often accompanying major festivals—are events where industry representatives gather. There are also smaller markets, such as local co-production markets. The two largest markets in Europe coincide with the festivals in Berlin—the European Film Market—and Cannes—the Marche du Film. These markets provide opportunities to meet with other industry representatives from various countries.

Markets can be divided into two main components, based on both the type of activities and their location:

1. Stands for Agents and Film Institutions
2. Market Screenings of Films

During a market, each sales agent has their dedicated stand, which can be a space within the market or a nearby location, where they arrange meetings with potential distributors, festival selectors, and other industry representatives. During these meetings, they discuss upcoming and current projects from the agent's catalogue. Typically, the films discussed are not only those screened at the festival but also future projects—for example, at the EFM, conversations revolve around films likely to be selected for Cannes, while at the Marche du Film, discussions focus on films that may be selected for Venice or the next Cannes festival.

The screening area usually consists of multiple rooms where agents showcase films. These may include films selected for the current festival, as well as those screened at previous or upcoming festivals. Importantly, aside from the time limitation (films typically cannot be older than a year), these screenings are not subject to the organisers' selection. They are paid screenings, for which either the sales agent or the producer covers the costs. Therefore, it is possible to show your film in Cannes or Berlin during the festival—though not as part of the official festival programme—by paying a substantial fee.

Market participants (distributors usually have accreditation for both the festival and the closed screenings) can view these films and decide on potential purchases. Often, it is easier for them to watch a film at a closed market screening than to secure tickets for an official festival screening. Consequently, such screenings are also arranged for selected films. A challenge lies in convincing distributors to dedicate their time to our film; personal meetings play a crucial role in this, as do promotional screenings that kick off the festival. Agents book rooms for these promo-reels to showcase extended teasers of their upcoming films or those being screened at the festival and market. Distributors flock to these screenings, where they also make decisions about which films to watch or discuss with agents.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://fiapf.org/festivals/accredited-festivals/>  
<https://www.europeanfilmacademy.org/app/uploads/2023/03/2023-festivalist-featurefilms.pdf>  
[https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/96\\_full\\_qualifying\\_festival\\_list-all\\_shorts.pdf](https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/96_full_qualifying_festival_list-all_shorts.pdf)<https://cineuropa.org/>  
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