

International Sales Opportunities for Independent Producers and Distributors

By Meg Villarreal and Diana Ingraham



With the evolution of new television channels throughout the world, it makes sense for independent producers and distributors to explore whether or not there may be new sources of revenue for their products. The following pieces are designed to give the newcomer who may be thinking about breaking into international sales an overview of some current trends, a road map to some of the key international markets where programs are bought and sold, and some practical advice on preparing for international distribution.

The international marketplace is changing dramatically. Until recently, network television and the major producing studios have dominated the international arena. Although network programs still account for the lion's share of international revenues, the worldwide explosion of cable networks and direct-to-home satellite channels has created many opportunities for the small to mid-sized American producer with finished product. Viewers in Europe, Latin America and Asia now have access to an ever-expanding array of new channels in addition to the traditional state-run television networks. These new channels are hungry for finished

product; particularly in their start-up phases, they may lack large budgets for commissioning new programs.

Over the past five years, strong interest has developed in nonfiction documentary programming, reality-based docudramas, educational/edutainment, children's fare and even "how-to." In particular, the international market for the documentary series has exploded. This year, the demand was so great that Europe's premier television marketplace, MIPTV, was preceded by MIPDOC - two days dedicated to documentary programming only. While the state-run networks (such as the BBC in England, ZDF in Germany or NHK in Japan) remain their country's premier outlets, representing the largest audiences and commissioning original series, the second- and third-tier cable and direct-to-home (DTH) satellite channels demand content for their niche audiences. Recent launches include the Odyssey Channel (France); Nickelodeon Latino, Canal+ (France) and its multi-thematic channels in Japan, Germany, and Spain; and JSkyB/Perfect TV in Japan. Cable satellite networks - including the Discovery International Networks in Latin American, Asia, and Europe, HBO International, and National Geographic Channels Worldwide - continue to expand.

While the new international television landscape has created new opportunities, it has also given rise to minefields. The proliferation of international networks brought about overlapping territories; this has implications for rights management. In the old days there were fewer potential buyers (the state-run networks in each country), but country territories were clearer. Today, the cable satellite network Discovery Europe, for example, reaches households in the U.K., Spain, Poland, Hungary and other countries, and is looking to acquire exclusive rights for its European cable satellite network. By the same token, existing terrestrial broadcasters and new pay cable channels in each of those countries also want first-run or exclusive rights. In the past, the territory that they would license programs for was defined by country boundaries. Nowadays, there are numerous buyers for each territory for a successful series. As Larry Adler of the distribution company Larry Adler Associates sums it up, "the operative phrase these days for distributors trying to manage their producers' rights is trying to figure out which combination of license agreements will result in satisfying the largest number of clients." For the right product this can translate into additional revenues

Going Rates

While experienced distributors, such as Nancy Walzog of Tapestry International in New York, caution against relying on the international marketplace to cover deficits after the fact, people can make money. Programs sold in Europe's top-tier markets can bring in significant revenues. Distribution of a documentary series in the U.K., France and Germany might gross \$25,000 to \$100,000 per hour if acquired jointly by the BBC, ZDF and Arte/La Sept. New cable networks and direct-to-home satellite services pay significantly less, \$500 to \$2,500 per hour. For this reason, distributors and rights holders try to bundle programming for bulk sales. For the seller, it costs as much time and effort to sell a 26-part series for \$2,000 per episode (\$52,000 for the series) as to sell a single program (a "one-off") for \$2,000. Once the typical distributor commission of 30 to 40 percent is built in, the economics become painfully clear.

Additional sources of revenue from international sales can be found in home video and, in some cases, educational markets. The best bet for one-offs is to try and fit them into an existing strand, which requires knowledge of the marketplace and links to acquisition executives. Outside of network fare and feature films, the genres that seem to travel best are children's animation, science, travel, American natural history, adventure, world history, nature programming and Hollywood biographies and star portraits. In the past year there has been a run on religion and spirituality programs as well.

International Program Markets

The vast majority of international sales originate at one of the program markets. The Market Overviews section provides brief descriptions of many of the most important markets and festivals where acquisition executives and distributors from around the world gather to buy and sell programming. Tom Salmon, national marketing manager for PBS station WLIW in New York City, is bullish on international potential. "It can be a heavy financial commitment to participate in international markets but remember, one good show will pay your way and then some," he says. "I don't know what it is, but when you meet people for the first time at a big market like MIPTV or MIPCOM, you tend to stay in their minds and often a lot of business connections will evolve as a result of that initial meeting. You are somehow taken more seriously as a player." He does warn, however, to think long-term. "But, if you decide to get into

international markets either to sell product or to develop relationships, the key is to make a long-term commitment, because if you don't show up for two consecutive markets, people think you are out of business. Even if you have couple of tight seasons, it's important to maintain a presence."

Moving into international distribution is not for the faint of heart; it is expensive and time-consuming. Registration and travel costs can be more than \$5,000 per market. Differences in culture and taste, language barriers and differences in technical broadcast standards (not to mention an economic crisis such as the current downswing in the Far East) complicate the distribution process. As with any industry, personal relationships and up-to-date market information are at the core of successful business. Dwight Hilson, chairman of Goldhil Entertainment, a leading distributor and producer of special-interest videos and programs in the U.S., offers his perspective as a relative newcomer to the international scene who started attending MIPCOM just two years ago. "We really didn't start making international contacts until we physically started going to shows two years ago," he says. "Every time we've gone, we've found programs to license, and we've found that personal contact is essential. You really have to meet someone face-to-face to establish a rapport; once you've done that, then you can move forward and do business together."

Of course, it makes sense to hook up with a good distributor, but self-education can be an important factor in a successful collaboration. Most of the distributors we spoke with commented that in the best of all possible worlds, producers would attend one or two markets to understand how they work and to collaborate more closely with their distributor. Finished programs still account for the vast majority of sales, but established international distributors are starting to involve themselves more closely in concept development and production financing. Larry Adler likes to get involved at the earliest stage possible. After 17 years in the business, he knows what works: more than 60 percent of his business is international. "I got tired of folks coming with finished programs that had little to no international potential," he says. "Now we get involved at the concept and scripting stage, and can often presell series to our international clients. We find that the international marketplace is becoming more and more important for raising production dollars - in many cases, more important than the U.S." For this reason

alone, it makes sense for some U.S. producers to attend one or more of the international markets. (See Market Overviews for more detail.)

Getting Plugged into the International Markets

"Knowledge of the marketplace" is the operative phrase. But you must pay for that knowledge yourself by spending the time and the money to build relationships and understand that what will and what will not sell. Or you can pay a commission to an international distributor and rely instead on his contacts, experience and salesmanship. Programming trends may come and go, and technology continues to change, but market veterans agree on some basic guidelines for those thinking about exploring the international distribution outlets:

Do Your Homework. Read trade publications (*Television Business International*, *RealScreen*, *World Television News*, *Broadcasting and Cable International*) and find out what buyers are looking for so you don't waste time pitching inappropriate product.

Schedule Appointments Ahead of Time. Figure out who you want to talk to and schedule meetings ahead of time. Whenever possible, send information in advance so you don't waste time on "cold calls," which are quickly forgotten at the markets.

Take a Long-Term Perspective. The infrastructure of the market consists of relationships; people do business with people they like and trust. Look at your first market as a way to begin building and establishing solid relationships. Then look to subsequent markets to develop further those relationships and partnerships. There is no substitute.

Plan to Have a Home Base. It is almost impossible to make any work on the fly without a home base - a place to hang your hat, retrieve messages, take phone calls or screen materials.

Develop Effective Sales Materials. Whether you are on your own or working through a distributor, you must make sure that your print materials and demos work. Sales sheets in particular must be graphically appealing and contain pertinent information: running time, number of episodes and program/series description.

Follow-up. Follow through by writing or calling. You may think you or your project is unforgettable, but it's not.

Trends to Watch in the U.S.

Interestingly, some of the most active international players, particularly in the non-fiction realm, are US-based National Geographic Channels Worldwide and Discovery Communications, Inc. Both seem to be shifting toward centralized buying decisions for their worldwide operations, says distributor Steve Janson of Janson Associates in Harrington, New Jersey. In some cases, this one-stop selling can be a boon to independent producers. But Janson is also quick to point out as these cable networks (and, increasingly, A&E/History) seek to acquire more international broadcast, home video and even nontheatrical rights, independents are forced into "work-for-hire" situations where they are unable to build equity in and ownership of their work

Moreover, the largest players are often not positioned to exploit the huge libraries they are amassing. Lynne Shore, former Director of Programming and Acquisitions for Questar, Inc., a producer and distributor of special-interest videos and television programs, recommends that producers try to incorporate some sort of performance clause into agreements. If a title is not released into various ancillary markets within a reasonable period of time (one year to 18 months), then those rights revert to the producer.

Overviews of Major Markets and Festivals

The following international-market overviews are far from complete. In fact, one could easily find one or two markets and/or festivals for just about every week in the year - dealing with just about every genre. We have chosen to highlight these markets based on our own experience as participants and the opinions of our colleagues

As you begin to explore the myriad markets that are available, more and more of the smaller, niche ones will begin to surface. We urge you to look at these carefully. Which buyers, distributors and producers attend? You can request lists of past attendees from the market organizers; contact them and ask what they thought of the event. How was it organized? Who attended? Were there buyers with the ability to make deals, or just those who screen programs? How were sales overall? What other events/venues were offered to participants?

We also want to warn you about the costs involved. Not only will you pay the registration and/or market stand fees, but you'll have your on-site costs as well - travel, hotel, per diem. If you have a booth, you'll also

incur design costs and other on-site technical costs that can wreak havoc with your budget. In most European countries there is also the VAT (Value Added Tax). This tax can range anywhere from 10-20% of your costs and is often not figured in to the listed costs of a market. Check this out carefully. You can't avoid paying it, but there are ways to get reimbursed for the VAT in some cases - although it may take 4-6 months to receive your check.

Co-ventures, co-productions and pre-sales are increasingly important aspects of international markets because these days, funding for new programming often requires partnerships. However, it is important to remember that the core business conducted at most large and small markets is finished product sales.

THE MIPS: MIP-TV and MIPCOM

When: MIP-TV: April

MIPCOM: October

Where: Palais des Festivals, Cannes, France

Attendance: 10,000 - 12,000 producers, distributors, buyers and broadcasters

Cost: Expensive. Expect to spend about \$5,000 for registration, travel, lodging and per diem. The cost of exhibition space starts at about \$7,000, excluding build-out and decorations.

Value: Distribution opportunities are good. If you have quality product (and lots of it) and do your homework ahead of time, the market can work for you, but it takes a long-term commitment. Co-venture opportunities are mediocre to good. If it's your first international foray, your chances are slimmer. If you're doing follow-up or have some connections, they are somewhat better. Again, it's key that you come prepared and are committed to doing follow-up with the contacts you make.

Summary: The MIPS - considered the grand daddies of the international markets - can be overwhelming. Each year, 10,000 to 12,000 people attend who are buying, selling, co-producing and making deals. Players include the major commercial and public service broadcasters, cable casters, satellite distributors, production houses and independent producers from all corners of the earth. If you want to sell something, there's bound to be a buyer, but don't plan to retire on what you will make on the sale. Most major buyers are booked before they arrive at

Cannes; this is why it's so important to set up appointments before you leave home. But acquisitions executives from new cable networks and direct-to-satellite services, especially from the developing countries, are looking for lots of product, so bulk is always better.

The MIP markets have also established a legal center, so if you do make a deal, there are communications lawyers from several different countries ready to guide you through the intricacies of an agreement. However, before you sign anything, make sure your own legal counsel checks it out. In addition to the frenzy of buying and selling, both markets offer screenings, seminars and press conferences. The market simulations moderated by Pat Ferns, executive director of the Banff Television Festival, can be especially helpful to those seeking to enter the international co-production arena. In these simulations, producers present ideas in development to three representatives of broadcast agencies in order to garner reactions. Criticism may be harsh, but the wise producer will use it constructively as he develops his proposal further. For those in the audience, it is a good opportunity to learn what others are looking for in a project, either as a partner or a buyer.

MIP Market Special Niche Screenings

When: MIPDOC: April

MIPCOM JR.: October

MIP ASIA: December

Where: MIPDOC and MIPCOM JR: Palais des Festivals, Cannes, France

MIP ASIA: Singapore (1998); previously Hong Kong

Attendance: MIPDOC - 378 buyers; MIPCOM JR - 337 buyers; MIP ASIA 2300-2500 participants

Cost: Each market requires separate registration fees from the MIPS. Registration in MIPDOC or MIPCOM JR is not included in the registration in the regular MIP markets and runs approximately \$1,200 to \$1,300. MIP ASIA costs significantly less than MIPCOM or MIP-TV. Participation without a stand will cost about \$700 to \$800. Exhibit space runs approximately \$7,000 for a basic stand without any build out.

Value: MIPDOC and MIPCOM JR: Good MIP ASIA: Worthwhile, if Asia is your market. Mostly junior officials who often do not have the authority to make deals.

Summary: The MIP markets have recently been extended. Special niche screenings organized by Reed-Midem are now held directly before each of

the larger Cannes markets. Producers submit programs on video cassette, which are gathered into libraries. Buyers have the opportunity to browse through the libraries and select programs for screening in a carrel. At the conclusion of each day, producers are given the list of buyers who screened their programs, complete with contact information and buyers' comments about their interest in the film. The "registration" fees simply entitle producers to submit programs. There is little or no opportunity to interact face to face with the buyers during the screening process. The greatest value of the screenings is that they provide producers who attend the follow-up market (either MIP-TV or MIPCOM) with a list of "pre-qualified" buyers who might be interested in licensing their product.

MIPDOC, which features documentary and factual programs, was introduced for the first time this spring before MIP TV. Dan Markim, executive vice president for Schlessinger Media, a division of the Library Video Company, raved about it. "As a buyer, the opportunity to view tapes without interruption or sales hype was unbelievable," he says. "In two days, I viewed 150 products. At other markets, I spend the majority of time trying to figure out from a sales flyer whether a show exists or if it is in development and if they have video/TV rights. Then I spend weeks trying to get screening cassettes." MIPCOM JR has gotten similar enthusiastic support from children's program buyers. Some exhibitors worry that buyers, having come two days early, will then leave two to three days early, without looking at other projects within the targeted genres or other projects outside the niche screenings. MIPASIA targets the vast Asian market. If that is your target, it is a worthwhile effort. This is generally regarded as a "smaller" market and many of the heavy hitters from the various corners of Asia still prefer to travel to Cannes, leaving the "local" market to more junior officials who often do not have authority to make deals

MONTE CARLO TELEVISION MARKET

When: February

Where: Monte Carlo, Monaco

Attendance: 2,000 participants; 130 exhibitors and 550 buyers

Cost: Exhibiting costs approximately \$5,000 to \$6,000 (depending on the value of the dollar to the French franc) and includes 5 registrations. Participation without a stand is \$400 to \$500 per individual.

Value: If the buyers that you need to reach attend this market, it can be a very productive venue. The smaller number of participants can translate

into more screening time and more time discussing mutual needs and interests.

Summary: This market, almost 40 years old, is enjoying a resurgence in popularity after a few down years. The 400-plus buyers who attend like the less-stressful pace. The physical layout (third floor suites in the Loews Hotel) and smaller attendance allows more time for screening and discussion. Because the screening salons are all in the hotel suites and include furniture and a TV/VCR, there are no fees for stand construction and decoration. However, hospitality costs for food and drink can add up.

Although this market focuses on drama and formats (increasingly, international networks will buy the "concept" of a show and then revise it specifically for their audiences), it attracts documentaries as well. Buyers/producers also have the chance to explore co-production possibilities. In fact, deals are often initiated in Monte Carlo and culminated at MIP or MIPCOM. There is also a juried festival that runs concurrently with the market. Some distributors have started entering product in the festival to highlight their participation in the market

NATPE

When: January

Where: New Orleans, Louisiana (venue changes each year)

Attendance: 17,000 participants, representing 90 countries (1998)

Cost: As low as \$2,400 for specialty pavilion packages (an Independent Pavilion; a Documentary Pavilion; an Animation Pavilion; or German, British or French Pavilions, for example). This includes three registrations and exhibition space with minimal decorations. Individual registration costs about \$535 per person.

Value: This was the original market for syndicated programming in the U.S. Now it's an increasingly important international marketplace for all programming genres. Latin American broadcasters and buyers attend it in greater numbers than they do the MIP because it's closer and it costs less. NATPE is also known for excellent professional development seminars and presentations by top industry executives. The huge size (40% larger than the MIPs) means it's challenging for independents to stand out. But more and more, it's become the market to strengthen relationships started at MIPCOM.

Summary: Historically a syndication market, NAPTE is fast becoming an international market place for all types of programs. Many people consider NATPE the other international market that's crucial to attend. The seminars are high caliber, and bring in commissioning editors, broadcasters and producers from major markets around the world. As with other markets, it's important to make your appointments before arriving. However, there does seem to be more opportunity to meet with folks on a catch-as-catch-can basis. As the market gets more popular, however, this casual atmosphere may change. Certainly, for those who are just venturing out into the international arena, this market is a more economical consideration, but don't expect miracles. As one executive from The Learning Channel noted to a group of European independent producers and distributors, "Don't come to the market expecting to hand me a script or video and expect me to make a decision on the spot. Do plan well in advance to send me all the relevant paper or video and then request a meeting during the market. If it is a project we are interested in, you can bet I will want to make an appointment to talk to you. Just don't plan to shove anything at me at the market, I'm too solidly booked and I can't remember it all."

ARTS IN A NEW MATRIX

When:

Where: Rotating locations

Attendance: Limited to 35-45 producers and broadcasters (by invitation)

Cost: Starting in 1999 there will be a registration cost, in addition to hotel and travel costs.

Value: For arts and arts/documentary producers as well as broadcast program directors, this conference provides a unique opportunity to discuss projects in-depth, to see new product, and hear about new co-production and co-venture opportunities.

Summary: An invitation-only opportunity for producers of arts documentaries. Cosponsored by the Ambassade de France, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Goethe Institute-Washington and Telefilm Canada. The goals of this intimate, three-day seminar are simple: fostering intercultural dialogue, laying the basis for arts-based documentary co-production development and opening new channels of distribution for these programs. In 1998, the organizers opened the competition to projects from countries other than those of the four

original organizers. Projects must come with significant funding already in place and be true co-ventures. In addition to pitching projects, participants can look at projects from other producers and discuss what makes a successful international co-production.

BANFF TELEVISION FESTIVAL

When: June

Where: Banff Springs Hotel, Banff, Alberta, Canada

Attendance: Attendance is around 1,500. In 1997 there were 722 program entries from 35 countries.

Cost: Sliding rate, depending on when you register. Right up until festival, rate is \$975 Canadian dollars plus hotel and per diem.

Value: Increasing international participation. Quality sessions and an opportunity to meet and talk with broadcasters, commissioning editors, producers, and distributors. Again as a smaller venue there is greater opportunity to spend quality time. Beautiful setting! **Summary:** The Banff Television Festival combines an international program competition with a conference attended by industry professionals from around the world. The festival features awards and prizes, including lifetime achievement awards for outstanding people in the television industry. Market simulations and more than 50 hours of workshops, panels and other meetings focus on issues that affect television programming, production and policy. The festival has been cited by many in the business as the meeting they would not miss.

SHARING STORIES

When: November/December

Where: Scotland (Alternates between Glasgow and Edinburgh)

Attendance: Around 225. Organizers try to limit attendance so that there is ample opportunity for interaction among participants.

Cost: 250 pounds plus hotel costs. Hotel runs 90 to 130 pounds per night.

Value: When you are serious about international co-production, this is the place to be. Not necessarily for the neophyte producer. **Summary:** This small, intimate and important gathering of commissioning editors, producers, broadcasters, and funders is one of the best-kept secrets of all the meetings and festivals. It gives you a chance to meet others dedicated to producing good TV. One of the rules of the meeting is that

once the sun goes down, no one discusses business. In the evening, you can either slink away with colleagues and break the rules - or embrace the spirit of the meeting and get to know your fellow attendees as real people. From such stuff co-productions *are* made. One highlight of this market: two or three commissioning editors ante up a cash prize to develop, on-site, a concept they feel will work either as a co-production or presale. They set out guidelines the first evening, and participants have two days to develop (or refine) an idea and submit it. The offering editors make the selection, and the award (usually for R&D) is given on the last day of the meeting.

SUNNYSIDE OF THE DOC

When: June

Where: Palais du Pharo, Marseille, France

Attendance: 1200 to 1500

Cost: Approximately \$900-\$1,000 (or FF5,000) to participate in the American Corner and have full advantages for screenings and seminars. Hotel, travel, and per diem is additional. **Summary:** The Sunnyside provides a casual atmosphere in which to meet with international counterparts and get to know and understand the documentary market in other parts of the world. Jane Weiner, an American who produces in the U.S. and France, likens this market to a boutique where quality rules over quantity. "If you are interested in the full range of documentaries, this is the place to be," She says. Drinking a coffee in the warm Marseille sun, you may suddenly find yourself part of a discussion on international documentary production and marketing. The festival gives you the advantage of seeing a variety of documentaries from many different locations. You have the chance to discover what makes a documentary great in one market and less-than-great in another.

ROTTERDAM MARKET FOR EDUCATIONAL SCREENINGS

When: April

Where: Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Attendance: 170 representatives from 50 different countries

Cost: Approximately \$900 - \$2,000 depending on level of participation, plus travel, hotel and per diem.

Value: This new market is the only one currently being held in Europe that deals specifically with education. It's an excellent place for producers and distributors of this genre to meet, review product and learn about projects in development.

Summary: The Beurs World Trade Center in the center of Rotterdam was again the setting for the second Rotterdam Market for Educational Screenings in 1998. The market is under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union and is modeled after the U.S. Educational Television Screenings, FirstView. It is the only market in Europe that focuses on educational and instructional television and video programs (preschool to adult). It offers two days of intense screenings, as well as a session on co-production, where ideas in development may be presented to educational broadcasters worldwide for co-production or presale consideration. Although the market is small by most standards, it provides a new and important service in an increasingly important niche area, education. Increasingly, broadcasters and cable casters are seeking "educational" programs and series to place in their schedules. No longer is education the purview of in-school programming. It's now a more widely defined informational approach that seeks to help audiences become better informed on specific issues: ecology, history, arts and culture, and much more. While some programs and series may meet specific curriculum needs within schools and universities, they are not limited to this more formal or targeted approach.

At the Rotterdam market, you can see what works in other countries and cultures, and how you may (or may not) be able to adapt your product to meet specific approaches and styles. Initial reactions to educational programs can often be overly critical - the "it would never work in my country" syndrome. But further discussion often opens doors to exciting possibilities. Hopefully, the the audience ends up learning about a topic through the eyes of someone from another culture.

If you're a producer of educational programs, the Rotterdam Market is a valuable place to explore co-production options. However, if you're serious about entering into such ventures, there is one element that you must remember: the need for flexibility. If you are committed to developing an international cooperative venture, you must be prepared to be where your potential partners will be, which often means figuring in heftier travel budget in the preplanning stages. As with any agreement, all parties want to be comfortable with their potential partners; you can't accomplish this in one meeting.

FIRSTVIEW

When: July/August

Where: (location changes each year)

Attendance: 250 education programmers, producers, and distributors
Cost: Registration is approximately \$600-\$700 for participants. For distributors who screen programs for licensing consideration, cost can run to several thousand dollars depending on the level of participation. Hotel, travel and per-diem is additional.
Value: This is the only market in the U.S. that concentrates on K-12 television and related media product.

Summary: Although this conference is generally recognized as an instructional television screening, the first two and a half days of the meeting are devoted to the International Educational Co-production Seminar. For the past several years, producers from more than 18 countries have met to present educational co-venture concepts to potential partners from a variety of countries with myriad educational needs. It was not an instant success, but slowly and steadily, partners have begun to understand production and curriculum needs. The last few meetings have spawned several co-productions; "Democracy 2000", a seven-country collaboration that looks at the issue of democracy through the eyes of young people, will air in 1999. Other two-and-three country projects that began at the seminar are returning as offerings to FirstView participants.

THE WORLD EDUCATION MARKET

When: May

Where: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Attendance: Unknown. The May 2000 event will be the first year of this market.

Cost: To be determined

Value: Unknown. The organizers intend to attract major international producers and distributors of education product.

Summary: Announced this year by the Reed-Midem Organization (developers of the MIP TV markets), this market is billed as an "annual trade show dedicated to the international business of education. [It] will be the first commercial forum for public and private sector players from all areas of education, serving learners of all ages, regardless of their location or choice of media - from educational institutions to at-home learning, from technical schools to workplace training, from books and television to the Internet."The definition of "education" is much broader than the one we recognize in the U.S. It goes beyond the traditional

market, targeted to in-school television and curriculum-based telecourses, to include documentaries as well as history-based series designed for prime time. The market will offer opportunities to buy and sell product, as well as conferences on "doing business in education" and practical workshops on adapting content to reflect local needs and circumstances. While it's too soon to get precise information about the market, you may want to e-mail the organizers to get on a mailing list so you can be informed as plans progress.

Contact Information and Dates for Foreign Markets and Festivals Please Note: All festival dates and locations are subject to change. Always double check with the festival organizers.

ARTS IN A NEW MATRIX

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When:

BANFF TELEVISION FESTIVAL

Contact: Banff Television Festival
1516 Railway Avenue Canmore
Alberta, Canada T1W 1P6
Phone: 403-678-9260 / **Fax:** 403-678-9269
Website: www.banfftvfest.com
When: June

FIRSTVIEW

Contact: Bill Myers
NETA (National Educational Telecommunications Association)
PO Box 50,008
Columbia, SC 29250
Phone: 803-799-5517 / **Fax:** 803-771-4831
E-mail: bmyers@netaonline.org
Website: www.netaonline.org/FirstView.htm
When: July/August

MIP TV and MIPCOM

Contact: Reed-Midem Organization, Inc.

475 Park Avenue South, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10016

Phone: 212-689-4220 / **Fax:** 212-689-4348

Websites: MIPCOM www.mipcom.com MIPTV www.miptv.com

When: MIPTV: April 12-17, 1999 MIPCOM: October

MIP Market Special Niche Screenings

Contact: Reed-Midem Organization, Inc.

475 Park Avenue South, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10016

Phone: 212-689-4220 / **Fax:** 212-689-4348

Websites: MIPCOM JR under the MIPCOM website: www.mipcom.com

MIPDOC under the MIPTV website: www.miptv.com

MIP ASIA: www.mipasia.com

When: MIPDOC: April 10-11, 1999

MIPCOM JR.: October

MIP ASIA: December

MONTE CARLO TELEVISION MARKET

Contact: North American Representatives: Vital Communications

6040 Boulevard East, Suite 27C

West New York, NJ 07093

Phone: 201-869-4022 / **Fax:** 201-869-4335

E-mail: vitcomusa@aol.com

Website: under construction

When: February

NATPE (National Association of Television Program Executives)

Contact: NATPE

2425 Olympic Boulevard, Suite 550

E. Santa Monica, CA 90404

Phone: 310-453-4440 / **Fax:** 310-453-5258

Website: www.natpe.org

When: January

ROTTERDAM MARKET FOR EDUCATIONAL SCREENINGS

Contact: North American Representatives for The American Corner U.S. Independents

5603 Inverchapel Road
Springfield, VA 22151
Phone: (703) 321-9362 / Fax: (703) 321-8098
Email: meg.villarreal@usindependents.com
Website: www.rotterdammarket.org
When: April

SHARING STORIES

Contact: Sharing Stories
Castlecliff
25 Johnson Terrace
Edinburgh, Scotland EH1 2NH
Phone: 44 (0) 131 622 7370 / Fax: 44 (0) 131 622 7338
E-mail: sharings@ednet.co.uk
Website: www.sharingstories.org.uk
When: November/December

SUNNYSIDE OF THE DOC

Contact: North American Representatives for The American Corner, U.S. Independents
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Some Practical Tips for International

Co-Production/ Distribution

The following list of tips is based on conversations with producers and broadcasters who have ventured into international sales of finished product and also weathered the co-production storm. Although far from complete, the list provides a number of elements for producers/distributors to take into consideration before they try to sell their wares to the international market or enter into conversations with potential co-venture partners.

- Make sure the production has separate music and effects (M&E) tracks so that a foreign language track can be laid in over the English-language narration. The music and effects can be mixed around the new voice track. If there is no separate M&E track, then the level of the mixed track - voice, music and effects - must be reduced, which makes for a muddier sounding program.
- Create a written script/transcript to facilitate translation and/or subtitling. A transcript of the program is essential for international sales of finished product.
- Clear international rights for everything - music, footage, talent, home video, education and the rest. Even if you can't afford to pay the world-wide rights up front, at least try to negotiate a total fee at the beginning of the project, with an option window to exercise those rights.
- Anticipate the technical costs of creating international formats (PAL or SECAM) for preview and broadcast.
- Never assume that an American narration/sound track will travel successfully outside this country. Language issues aside, an American writer often assumes a knowledge of colloquialisms, place or history that may not be shared by an international audience.
- Remember that subtitles (other than for identification) don't travel well. This is common wisdom in the United States and holds true elsewhere.
- Avoid on-camera presenters and talking heads. International audiences generally do not want to listen to an American narrator or host. If the

material is appropriate and interesting they would much rather wrap their own host or personality around the segments.

- Be aware that international audiences do not like short (two- to three-minute) segments. There are significant differences in pacing between most American productions and those of other cultures. In documentary or news-magazine programs, the shorter segments favored by U.S. producers often appear choppy and shallow to foreign viewers.
- Don't expect to sell current affairs or public affairs documentaries on subjects that could be produced locally.
- Steer clear of 90-minute documentaries; they're hard to place in international schedules.
- Provide sales sheets with information about running time, number of episodes and brief descriptions of the series or program. The first point of contact with a prospective buyer is often through print. At most markets, large or small, buyers go from stand to stand picking up and looking at sales materials or "one-sheets." This visual presentation of the program, is an important tool.
- Provide some definitions of terms. There is a difference between "pre-sales" and "co-productions or co-ventures". In a pre-sale, editorial control and production aren't shared; a broadcaster agrees to license a program or series for its broadcast territory. A co-production is a financial and editorial relationship between production entities from different countries that is based on a treaty between those two countries. The United States has no treaties with any countries. So the international marketplace tends to use the word "co-venture" instead. In a co-venture, two parties come together to jointly raise funding and produce a product that will be appropriate for their individual markets.

An Insider's Advice on How to Work with A Distributor

If you're a small independent, it makes sense to hook up with the right distributor, both because it is more cost effective and because the

distributor is selling a variety of programs to a variety of buyers. The better informed you are, the better able you will be to find the right distributor and to evaluate his performance. As one public television executive said, "In the best of all possible worlds, every producer would attend one of the major international markets at least once, just to understand firsthand the international marketplace and the processes required for successful sales." We excerpted the following information from a detailed package that producer-turned-distributor Lise Romanoff, managing director of Vision Films in Los Angeles, provides to producers. We include it here not as an endorsement, but as an example of how one ethical, successful distributor works. Compare Romanoff's methods with any potential international distributor with whom you may consider working.

Which Markets Do You Attend?

With a stand, Romanoff attends NATPE (January), Monte Carlo (February), MIPDOC/MIPTV (April), LA Screenings (May), DISCOP (June), MIPCOM (October) and MIP ASIA (December). Without a stand, AFM (March) and VSDA (July). Romanoff sees participation in these festivals as a strong advertisement to potential buyers. Vision spends approximately \$90,000 per year attending trade markets. It is listed in each of the trade show guides distributed to all buyers and participants at the shows.

How Do You Promote the Products You Represent to Potential Buyers?

Vision sends product listings sheet to more than 40 international entertainment trade publications for each of the markets they attend. These publications feature distributor programming offerings in their special trade show buying guide issues which reach buyers worldwide. In addition, targets programs to specific territories and buyers. Romanoff creates a specialized direct-mail list of available programming and faxes it to appropriate broadcaster/home video buyers in that territory. She estimates that, on average, they will send out approximately 750 faxes before each of the eight international trade shows they attend each year.

What Promotional Materials Do You Use?

Vision uses one-sheet flyers as the main print vehicle, but also likes to use a three- to five-minute promo at the trade markets as a sales tool. Romanoff sends out at least 100 VHS screening cassettes to prospective

buyers over the first year. These dubs come directly from the master or submaster so that quality is high.

How Long Will It Take to Make a Sale?

Sales are made all year long, but Vision tries to focus sales efforts around the trade shows. Almost all of the rest of the business is maintained through faxed correspondence and telephone calls. It can sometimes take months to get a buyer to notice a program or close a single license. On average, Romanoff estimates that a sale may take three to six months from initial introduction to receiving the final payments. She tells producers that they will start to see a steady return on all the first sales after the first six months. Licenses are usually two to three years for TV and five to seven years for video. After the initial run, reruns may bring in 50 percent of the original license fee.

How Much Money Can an Independent Expect to Make?

Romanoff stresses that distributors will be reluctant to commit themselves. She says, "It is truly impossible to make accurate projections - anyone who does is talking generalities. If a program sells in the US to a major network or airs primetime on a major cable network, it will sell to major networks around the world. If a program sells to a niche cable channel then the average is somewhere in the low to middle of the listed prices. Of course, topical programs sell well even if they have never had a release in the US." All distributors use a list published by TBI (Television Business International) as a guide. It shows the average rates paid for each territory for one-hour programming.

How Much Will an Independent Have to Pay to Have Work Represented?

Most distributors work on commission, usually charging 25 percent to 35 percent in the international market and 15 percent to 25 percent in the domestic market. Most distributors will also deduct direct expenses, which can eat up a lot of revenue. If distributors say they will deduct expenses, ask them to itemize.

Are Agreements Exclusive and How Long Do They Last?

Most distributors require exclusivity. As a former producer, Romanoff is sensitive to producers' fears of tying-up their show up with an exclusive distributor for a long time: But she explains: "We need exclusivity. There are a finite number of buyers and they will get confused if they are

pitched the same product by more than one person. They will not buy the show."

What Are Delivery Elements?

Delivery elements are the materials necessary to fulfill the terms of the contract. Materials include videotape masters with separate music and effects track, dialog continuity transcripts, music cue sheets and slides cleared for use in advertising.

What Is an International Master?

Commonly called an M & E track. On BetaSp, Digital Betacam, and D2 there are 4 channels of audio. The best audio configuration for all international licenses is

Ch. 1 = Composite mono-mix,

Ch. 2=M & E or Music and Effects mixed track (no English),

Ch. 3 = Mix minus narration (Original language on the interviews but no narration track) and

Ch. 4 = Music full up (not mixed).

This allows clients to have flexibility in the type of dubbed version they create: A full lip-synched dub in their country's language replaces all original language and makes each character appear to be speaking in that country's tongue; an overlay dubbed version allows the original language to start, the sound is turned low and the new country's language is laid on top of it. If you have any further questions, you can contact Lise Romanoff at

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Her telephone number is (818)784-1702, her fax is (818)788-3715, and her email address is visionfilms@earthlink.net .

Co-Production in International Television:

Making the Marriage Work

by Leo Eaton

The following article was excerpted from one written by Leo Eaton for the U.S./NHK Co-production Seminar, held in Honolulu, Hawaii, December 1992. It is reprinted with permission of the author.

The idea of co-production is very good, very necessary. It is the sort of thing that senior executives and broadcasters around the world say, "Ah, yes, we must do it," and assume that just by saying it, they can make it happen. But if we are going to be honest, no producer really likes doing co-productions. They're difficult. They're complicated. They cause a lot more work. I think we all wish we had sufficient money, sufficient resources and sufficient international awareness to just go off and make the sort of films that we want to make. But that's not the world we're living in. We can't afford to fund the programs we want to make so we have to co-produce, and we have to learn how to make it work. And not only may we actually enjoy the process, but we may also widen our own perspective and make a more interesting and less insular program. That means knowing very clearly both how similar we are to our partners, and how very different we are.

A colleague at NHK once mentioned that co-production is like an "omiai," an arranged marriage. I think it is. In any marriage, there are major crises that come and go. And on the first major crisis, either a divorce happens or the marriage is stronger because of it. You survive the first crisis and the worst may be over. Other crises will come and go but you now have a history of working through problems. A partnership is developing.

There are actually very few projects that lend themselves to true co-productions, and one of the first rules is to know when a project is not suitable. If it is wrong, don't try it. As we find ways to work together, what becomes critical is a quality visual style and story-telling approach to documentary filmmaking that can work for audiences in all of our different areas, and different markets. How do we deal with issues of creative control?

How do we deal with issues of editorial focus? One of the cardinal rules of co-production - and in some cultures one of the most difficult to follow - is the need for candor. We must curtail some of the diplomatic politeness at the outset of a production and quickly reach the intent - making programs that work. Ultimately, we will be judged on the quality of the show. We have to find a way to satisfy both of our audiences and still make the co-production work. We all want to make good films with good story-telling and good camera work and good editing. The components of good films are universal; the styles and the way we approach our subjects that are different.

All of us have a different way of looking at the world, no matter how similar or different we seem. We also often have a different approach to filmmaking, a different approach to telling a story. In the U.S./ Japan seminars, we take time to look at each others' films and talk about these differences. Approaches that we consider natural and acceptable in may be totally unacceptable to the Japanese, and vice versa. We need to know and understand that.

For a co-production to succeed, the partners must understand organizational structures and how they work. What are the lines of authority in a production crew? Even terminology can be different or mean different things. An overview of production pitfalls and how to avoid them is crucial.

Stylistic differences can also make or break a successful co-production. For example, feature documentaries in America differ significantly from their Japanese counterparts. In America, we think in terms of telling a story by developing a story dramatically, following a character with dramatic story development, and using the camera and editing to enhance the story. At NHK, documentary comes from a journalism background. The facts are important, not the film, style or storytelling. The camera work is often incidental, and includes handheld camera work with little concern about focus or extraneous movement.

Differences also emerge in editing. In America, the editing process can take up to three or four months, while at NHK, two to three weeks is the norm. It isn't that one approach is better, it again deals with style. We tend to edit visual images into an effective story; for the Japanese the approach is based on the script. Everything is plotted before entering the editing room and then the film is assembled shot by shot with little room for visual variation. Other stylistic differences bear mentioning such as the use of hosts. Although this device may work within a country, using a host does not strengthen the transferability of a co-production. Pacing should also be examined and dealt with before production. American audiences generally like fast-paced shows, with quick cuts and aggressive dramatic development. Countries such as Japan and England tend to prefer something slower-paced, with less talk and a sense of becoming part of what is happening on the screen.

Story structure is an important element in the development of co-production treatments. The American sense of the dramatic in its documentaries may cause problems with a Japanese audience that is used to a more journalistic approach. Also, one must consider symbolism. Words, expressions, and images can send entirely different messages to audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Both sides must be aware of the use of symbols in terms of what they convey. Finally, remember that when we are engaged in a co-production, we must assume that the project will be viewed in more countries than those of the co-production partners. If a project can work successfully in two different countries, then it will no doubt have value in a more global sense.

As we become more active partners in international co-production, many of these problems will disappear - and no doubt be replaced by new ones born of familiarity in working together. But we must remember that co-productions can and do work if both sides are willing to meet each other half way. At the end of a project, if we come away with a program and a new relationship that will endure, then the co-production has been a success. Co-productions are about building trust between people, and between organizations. Once we have established trust, the rest is easy. Or if not easy, then at least not as impossible as it sometimes seems.

Leo Eaton is executive producer with Cafe Productions, an international production company. He has survived the battles of many co-productions, such as MiniDragons and, most recently, Alexander the Great. His most recent productions for kids include a preschool series, Zoboomafoo. He has worked in television and film in the U.S. and Great Britain, and has written several children's books.

Diana Ingraham and Meg Villarreal are co-directors of U.S. Independents, Inc., a cooperative effort that helps independent producers and small distributors enter the international marketplace. U.S. Independents has been hired as consultants for several producers and distributors as various markets. The organization also educates independents from U.S., Europe and other countries through seminars and as consultants. Ingraham and Villarreal are ten-year veterans of the MIP Markets in Cannes. They have also attended MIPASIA, Monte Carlo, Sunnyside of the Doc, Rotterdam Educational Market, Arts in a New Matrix, FirstView and NATPE.

In addition to their collaborative work, Ingraham and Villarreal each have their own individual companies and as such, consult with U.S. public television stations, independent producers, and international broadcasting agencies.

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