

ACOFS - The Australian Council of Film Societies

Film Society Handbook

Chapter 11: PUBLICITY AND NEWSLETTER

[Jan 2010]

You need a publicity officer to ensure that this important function is not overlooked. The publicity officer should be responsible for the co-ordination of all aspects of publicity. Thus, his or her job will not only be to ensure the production of brochures and posters but also the running of the pre-season publicity campaign. Publicity should be thought of as a continuous operation and part of the job is to liaise with the local media (radio, TV and press) and local libraries where leaflets can be displayed and made available. Find out who would be interested in your publicity. Give them a complimentary membership and feed them information in the form of news items. The most likely items to be of interest to the media are those which are "newsworthy". "Banned Film to be shown at ..." , "Festival Winner for Film Society Program" , "New President for Film Society" , "Film maker to speak at" , "Membership rush Begins" , "Film Society Closes Membership". Keeping the society in the public eye as much as possible throughout the year is an important part of your publicity campaign.

You should always bear in mind that most films made available for film society use are shown on condition that there is no admission charge to see the film. A film society must be, and be seen to be, a "non-commercial" organisation and the easiest way to demonstrate this is to have no charge for coming to any film screening.

All publicity for such screenings should make it clear that members will need to join the society to see the films. Membership is preferably for 12 months but 6 or 3 monthly memberships are allowable. In your flyers, brochures and the website (if you have one), the society should set out the subscription rates including any concessions for students, unemployed, social security beneficiaries etc. A membership of less than 12 months should be the exception. If absolutely necessary to have a shorter membership period, the cost should be at least 50% more than the price of the ticket to the local (or nearest) cinema.

In newspaper, radio & TV ads (ie ads for the public) you should stress that you are promoting a society screening with membership available.

At no time can you give the impression that there is an admission charge for a society screening. The phrase "admission by donation" or "charge for afternoon tea (or supper)" should not be used. Distributors have been known to confuse membership rates with admission rates so it is best not to quote specific subscription rates in your public advertising.

Brochures and Leaflets

These are the main means of attracting new members and telling the public about the film society, and should therefore contain essential information about where and

when the society meets, how to join, who to contact, subscription rates, tear off membership application form, and sufficient information about the film to whet the appetite. For major impact the brochure should be eye-catching and therefore visual. Film is a visual medium and new members are more likely to be attracted to a few well chosen stills than lengthy verbiage. The brochure must look sufficiently interesting for people to want to pick it up in the first place. If you're worried about the cost of printing a brochure, think of it in terms of members. If 2 or 3 new members join as a result of distributing 1000 leaflets, this more than justifies the cost of printing them.

An attractive looking leaflet is of no use unless it reaches people, so distribution should be carefully handled. Copies can be placed in the public library, and most librarians will agree to this. Local schools, adult education centres and colleges should be given copies (you may not get too many pupils, but should pick up a few teachers). Leaflets and brochures should also be distributed individually by members of the committee. Don't forget that the vast majority of members are obtained through direct contact with an existing member — so help them recruit by distributing the brochure to friends and acquaintances, or to anybody who shows the slightest interest.

Care should be taken if you are advertising a recent release film, especially if there is a commercial cinema in your area. There have been cases in the past where commercial cinema owners have been very upset when a film society has advertised a DVD or 16mm version of the film they are about to screen in their cinema. It is good policy to always be on good terms with the local cinema manager. Remember you are promoting the membership rather than the specific films.

Mailing List

Build up a mailing list and email list of anybody who is likely to be interested. On this list include your committee's friends and acquaintances, local schools, libraries and clubs. Also borrow the mailing lists of other cultural organisations (Arts Council branches, drama groups, music societies, etc.). If anyone contacts the society as a result of some publicity initiative then get their names and addresses and email addresses. If a non-member comes to a screening, make sure you get their details. A mailing list is basic to a film society. Use it to send details of free screenings, to send your program brochure and to send reminders of your activities.

Posters

An attractive eye-catching poster is essential. It is possible to present to the public a good deal of information in a poster — list the films screened, the actors, directors, countries of origin, cost of subscription, meeting time, venue name and address and phone number of the membership secretary. Posters should emphasize that admission is by membership. Get your committee to plaster the town with posters — particularly the local shopping centres, as well as the humble corner store. The more posters you put up, the more chance people have of seeing them. Apart from shops, don't forget libraries, schools, information centres, railway stations and even the local cinema if the manager is agreeable.

Radio and television

Access to the electronic media may be difficult in the large cities, but it's worth a try anyway. In provincial centres, radio and television stations are always looking for local news items and personalities to interview. So give them a try. You can probably secure a 5-10 minute interview on radio or perhaps less on TV to promote your society. All it will cost you is butterflies in the stomach if you haven't done this sort of thing before! Seek out the newsworthy aspects of your program.

Please stress that your society is for members only and that annual membership is available. Give a contact number for more details — ensure that someone (or answering machine) is standing by to take any calls.

Web page on the Internet

Many Film Societies have websites and build up lists of email addresses of interested people. The web page is a constant presence available to everyone so ensure you meet all the necessary conditions. If you mention film titles, ensure that the requirement of admission by membership is promoted. Rather than give details of where and when to “turn up”, offer contact details - phone and email addresses – for further information.

Promotional displays and exhibitions

Apart from the usual publicity (posters, brochures and newspaper stories) try something extra like a display in the local library, large store or bank. Film posters, film books or old movie equipment could form the basis of such a display, at which of course, you publicise your film society.

During the year many opportunities arise for publicising the society e.g. local arts festival, music festival, concert, etc. Produce enough posters and leaflets for such occasions. Some municipal councils organise community days to allow local organisations to publicise their activities. Don't miss out on such opportunities.

Timing of the publicity campaign

Most film society seasons commence sometime in February and end in November or early December. Established film societies will usually open membership for the following year sometime in October or November. At this stage brochures and posters may not be ready, and consequently any publicity campaign will be low key. Most film societies rely on an intensive campaign commencing 3-4 weeks before their season commences. On the other hand it feels nice to have enough members before Christmas to cover costs for the year. A pre-Christmas Campaign means that you have to be organised much earlier, but if the campaign fails you have plenty of time to plan another one. The decision to offer membership for 12 (or 6) calendar months from the date of joining or from the beginning of the year and then offer a discount for those joining half way throughout the year depends on personal preferences of the committee (or membership secretary).

The Best Publicity is

As personal promotion is most effective, provide suitable material such as handbills to your members so they may more easily convince their friends to join — and give them an incentive — a free guest ticket for each new friend joining up for example.

A Newsletter and Web Site

There are a number of reasons for having a regular newsletter or perhaps a society website

Newsletter.

To get value out their membership, members must turn up to at least some screenings, otherwise they will not rejoin when membership is up for renewal. A regular monthly newsletter jogs their memory and therefore increases attendance at screenings, ensuring a higher proportion of re-enrolments in the next year.

Program Notes.

One of the main objectives of a film society is the encouragement of an intelligent, informed and discriminating attitude towards film as an art form. One of the best ways of achieving this is through the provision of information and comment on all the films screened by the society. Notes on the films should contain a reasonable amount of historical, artistic and technical data. Production credits, leading players, country of origin, brief synopsis and critical appraisal are all of interest to society members. The notes may also include some material for discussion; background on the film, its creators, its historical perspective and its subject matter; they may also include references for further reading. Information for these may be obtained from appropriate film magazines or websites.

Society News.

A newsletter is also a vehicle for passing on film society news to members. This includes reminders of programs, program changes, film festival news, information on good films showing at the local cinema, and maybe snippets of news such as titles of award winning films (Cannes, Academy Awards, AFI, etc.). If your society uses appraisal forms or questionnaires, then the results of these can be put in the newsletter.

Distribution

The easiest and cheapest way to distribute a newsletter is to hand it out as members enter the venue. If this is done then the newsletter will not act as a reminder to members; also not all members will get it unless you are fortunate to have a 100% turn-up (quite rare!).

Society Website

There may be someone in your Society who has the skills to set up a society website. While this should not replace the newsletter, since not all members have web access it is still very useful for those that have. Such a site could have programs, email list server to allow discussion and messages to be sent to officer bearers,

ACOFs and some state Federations have web sites. Each society is listed on these websites together with screening locations and contact details. A link to society websites are listed where available.

Some useful web sites are

The Internet has revolutionized the way we get information. Few societies now keep libraries of film books and magazines nor do they tend to visit a library for information. The Internet has made available a vast range of movie information.

All Movie Guide: www.allmovie.com

All Movie Guide offers reviews, biographies, ratings, images, titles, credits, and thousands of descriptive categories. Since 1991, the company All Media Guide has collected, processed and linked information for both in-print titles and historical out-of-print titles in a sophisticated relational database, licensed for commercial use and available to the public through proprietary Web sites. All content is original, written expressly for All Media Guide by a worldwide network of over 600 professional staff and freelance writers specializing in music, movies and games under three distinct websites.

Internet Movie Database: www.imdb.com

The IMDb website consists of one of the largest accumulations of data about films, television programs, direct-to-video products, and video games, reaching back to each medium's respective beginning. In many cases, the information goes beyond simple title and crew credit, but also includes data on uncredited personnel, production and distribution companies, plot summaries, memorable quotes, awards, reviews, box office performance, filming locations, technical specs, promotional content, trivia, and links to official and other websites. Furthermore, the IMDb tracks titles in production, including major announced projects still in development.

The database also houses filmographies for all persons, cast and crew, identified in listed titles. Filmographies include biographical details, awards listings, external links, and information about other professional work not covered by title entries in the database such as theatrical and commercial advertising appearances.