

Film Festivals

It seems that every town worth its salt is part of the film festivals movement. They have snowballed over the years, helping the independent film industry in increasing awareness of films that often have limited distribution. There is more to movies than going to watch the latest blockbuster at the multi plex. Independent filmmakers need to showcase their work, whether it is a feature film, a short or a documentary.

There is a practical side to showing films at film festivals. It gives directors and producers an opportunity to network and to sell their work to distributors. It's often a struggle, especially for someone who is making their first feature, to find funding for their project and distribution problems can add to that struggle.

Some festivals like to follow themes, such as gay and lesbian, animation, children's films or movies from a certain country or genre. Most film festivals however, like to show a mix and attract as many people as possible. The most famous example is the Cannes Film Festival. This is a prestigious event, attracting celebrities and world media. It's a competition event and the most prestigious award is for Best Film, awarded by the Palme d'Or (Golden Palm). American made films are shown but it is an excellent publicity opportunity for European movie makers.

The Sundance Film Festival is the largest of its kind in the USA. Most of the screenings take place at the Sundance ski resort in Utah, so named by actor Robert Redford who is very involved in the festival. American and international features and shorts are entered into competition. The festival began as a small scale affair for the independent sector but it is now attended by Hollywood celebrity actors and directors. Many directors made their career breakthroughs after screening their movies here, including Kevin Smith, Quentin Tarantino, James Wan, Steven Soderberg and Robert Bresson.

The UK has a lively involvement in film festivals. The largest continually run festival in the world is the Edinburgh one and the largest festival in the country is the Raindance Festival in London. Beginning in 1992, it came at the right time to promote British independent film, which is respected throughout the world. Patrons of the festival include Ewan McGregor, Terry Gilliam and Ken Loach. This event launched the British Independent Film Awards. Films from around the world that went on to international success have been shown too, such as the Blair Witch Project and Pulp Fiction.