



Developing Audiences for Cinema: Ten Top Tips

1. Not all cinema enthusiasts are the same

There are different kinds of film enthusiast. Specialist enthusiasts have strong preferences and know a lot about the genres, directors and actors they like. But Scattergun enthusiasts enjoy film as part of a very varied cultural diet and love to discover new films. That means they have a limited knowledge. And the arts enthusiasts dipping into film have no specialist knowledge at all.

The way we write about specialist film actively puts them off. They feel intimidated. So describe clearly what each film is about and what it will be like to watch. Don't name drop – always explain why a director, performer or film is worth seeing.

2. Most of the audience for specialist film are not film enthusiasts

Only one in five ticket buyers for film in mixed programme venues sees three or more films a year. The rest dip into the film programme. Of course you must nurture your film enthusiasts but there is huge potential to grow your audience by persuading arts enthusiasts to include the occasional specialist film on their menu.

So, talk about why they see film: entertainment, emotion, excitement, identification. Different films attract different people from this big pool of occasional attendees, so work out who is the audience for each film.

Get these dippers to come back – and that means capturing their contact details online and offline. Don't just talk to the people who have seen film recently, but reactivate the lapsed attendees.

3. Don't restrict access

Only one in five ticket buyers for specialist film is a film enthusiast so running a film society where only members and their guests can see films will make sure you get a small audience. Always allow people to buy tickets for individual films – after all, many of them could be future members.

4. Audiences are motivated by very different things

Some potential ticket buyers will be motivated by the director, actors or good reviews. Many, though, will be interested in what the film is about: cricket, F1, saving the planet, or have a strong connection with where the film is set. Others engage with the story line. So, talk to different audiences about different things.

Community connectors can help you communicate with special interest groups so search them out.



5. Target arts enthusiasts

Most ticket buyers for specialist film are arts enthusiasts rather than film enthusiasts. So, don't just market your film programme to the people who have recently bought for film. You also need to target the people who occasionally dip into the film programme and those who attend a range of events at your venue but haven't yet got around to seeing film.

Put your films in your main season brochure. Don't create a specialist cinema ghetto: organise your events in chronological order so the films are integrated into the rest of the programme (this also works with other artforms like dance). If you can't programme individual films early enough, give the season a high profile and flag up the dates.

6. Persuade them

Most of your potential audience are cultural omnivores not film enthusiasts so you will need to persuade them. Give reasons to get involved with your organisation not facts.

Give reasons to see a particular film, not facts about it. Use images that convey character, emotion and story. Write copy that reflects the things that people love about film: escapism, inspiration and enjoyment. Audiences say films help them define their identity and get through difficult times in their lives. They provide knowledge and promote understanding in an accessible way. Above all, film is enjoyable.

Encourage people to see unfamiliar and subtitled films by giving them familiar 'hooks' and emphasising familiar themes like sex, violence and vampires.

7. You're not normal

When we pick up a pen, we tend to go into essay mode. Write engaging copy that people can understand. You may want to aim for a reading age of 12.

8. Get on the radar

Make sure the building you use looks as though something exciting happens inside.

Be visible online. Online, six times more people use the word "cinema". If they type these key words plus your town, city or district in a search engine, can they find you on the first page of search results? If not, make sure you use these keywords several times in copy, headings, navigation and title tags. Make sure your venue is registered with Google Places for Business and that this enhanced information appears when people search for "cinema" or "film" in your area



Specialist cinema does best in venues that programme at least two events a week. The artform doesn't seem to matter; it's about doing enough to get noticed. Think laterally – how can you get more people to use your venue?

Putting on the odd film doesn't work. Venues that consistently programme film on a particular day of the week get bigger audiences. That's every Monday (or Tuesday – whatever) during the film season. If you need to programme full week runs of live performances, then create gaps for them between film seasons.

9. It's about more than the film

People are looking for places where they belong: a third space. These are easy to get to, welcoming, comfortable, offer food and drink, are full of people who use it regularly so people feel companionship and with new people to make friends with.

10. Know what's great about seeing film in your venue

Cinema is not just about the film – it's an experience. It's not about being cheaper, it's about the value of the experience. What are you offering as an alternative to the popcorn experience of mainstream cinema? Homemade cake? Nice wine? Good company? Peace and quiet in which to enjoy the film? Make sure you tell people why they should choose to see film in your venue.