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[FEATURE ARTICLES](#)

[FILM REVIEWS](#)

[VIDEO REVIEWS](#)

[DVD REVIEWS](#)

[BOOK REVIEWS](#)

[SOUNDTRACK REVIEWS](#)

[HOME](#)

NewFilmmakers

by Barney Oldfield

Film Festivals have become a major industry, at least in America, and you would be hard pressed to find a city with a stop-light and a Taco Bell that doesn't have one. Most of these Festivals are money-makers, for the people that run them and the towns that support them. Some have crossed over the border and have become pure rip-offs. One actually charges filmmakers \$300 or more to screen their film, and amazingly there are filmmakers dumb enough to pay it.

New York has two of the most famous or infamous. We have the New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center, which is somewhat of a cultural tar pit, and New Directors, which requires knee pads. Both tend to mix obscure works by unpronounceable filmmakers with commercial releases looking for artistic respectability in a cultural goulash.

When we started NewFilmmakers about two years ago we tried to re-invent this system. I had finished up at NYU Film and knew lots of filmmakers, too many filmmakers, and I was on the Board of Anthology thanks to my accountant who was their accountant. Anthology had two theatres and we used started screening indie films.

We invited people to attend and soon we were moving from the small theatre to the large. Filmmakers liked us because we had no forms and we had no fees. I really didn't want to know much more about the filmmaker than his/her film and I thought it was ridiculous to charge to look at it.

With the help of my business partner, another NYU Film graduate, we tried to make our Festival friendly to filmmakers and give them a chance to promote their films. Although we have been very successful filling seats and generating press, I think we have failed to fulfill these two goals.

Success brings huge amounts of submissions and we have become as judgmental and arbitrary as everyone else. There is no escaping this, there are more and more films being made each year and we have to select the best ones, no longer fulfilling the filmmakers needs, and now merely feeding an audience's appetite.

DV will probably increase the number of films exponentially. At least, before DV, you needed to know how to load a camera, now you can pop in a tape and become an instant filmmaker. Perhaps it will create a new film culture, more likely it will create an incredible glut of bad product. Regardless, there is no way all is going to get screened.

It is also questionable whether any of this leads to fame and fortune, which is the corner stone of a live festival raison d'etre - only 10% of Sundance Films eventually get distribution, and those that do seldom make much money. And I would guess that a good many of those 10% are studio films marketed as Indies.

Filmmakers can now sell their film on the Internet and not hope to become part of that 10% that gets a Distributor. Not all films will make money. most probably will not, but they all will have a chance in the marketplace and that is the real goal.

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