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Sydney's Buzz

PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN ON THE INTERNATIONAL MOVIE BIZ



Sydney's Buzz

Sydney Levine focuses on international film industry developments and analysis of the international film market related to buyers, sales agents, filmmakers, film festivals and distribution.

International Sales Agent: Shoreline has 2 Films in World Cinema

Morris Ruskin, Founder of Shoreline
By Guest Blogger Peter Belsito

We have known Morris for many years in our world of markets, film festivals, in the film business world in L.A. and places like Berlin, Sundance, Cannes, Toronto, the AFM. Today it's most exciting and most hectic for Morris because he just picked up two extraordinary films from Latin America which are in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition. [All Your Dead Ones](#) and [The Cinema Hold Up](#) both screened as Works in Progress at the San Sebastian Film Festival this fall and Morris, true to his love of Latin American films (Undertow, Zona Sur), acquired them on the eve of Sundance.



Morris Ruskin, Shoreline Entertainment

Although, as you shall soon read, he does many things in our film world, both in a business and creative sense, we have known and always thought of him principally as a successful, active and highly competent sales agent. The international sales agents are a very central, crucial, hard working sector in the film world and perhaps the least understood. There's a complex of buildings in Cannes on the ocean front thoroughfare La Croisette and on the beach called The Palais and The Riviera (adjacent building, connected). In the front, on the fabled 'red carpet' 100 films compete each May in Cannes for glory, deals and world press attention. Just next to it, in the Market / Marche du Film some 3,500 films compete quietly for business and sales in the hands of the 400 plus international sales agents attending the Cannes Festival and Marche du Film. Morris is one of the best of these deal making, film moving and discovering types. The sales agents form the core of the living breathing circulatory system we call the international independent film business.

We talked to Morris in Los Angeles recently.

To begin this story he said, 'this year we have two films in Sundance.'

They are both in World Dramatic Competition. They are:
The Cinema Hold-Up (Asalto Al Cine) – Iria Gomez Concheiro

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"What's ♀?"

This symbol indicates women company owners, directors, producers and writers. Until women reach a parity with men in the biz, I'm running a tab on The Female Factor.

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All Your Dead Ones (Todos Tus Muertos) – Carlos Moreno



Morris has also produced close to fifty films, including Glengarry Glen Ross, The Man from Elysian Fields, Lakeboat, Price of Glory, Marilyn Hotchkiss Ballroom Dancing & Charm School, The Visit, Everything's Gone Green, The Signal and Weirdeville. Three of his films have previously premiered at Sundance; six have premiered at TIFF / The Toronto International Film Festival; he's produced the opening night selection at Slamdance (rump fest taking place in Park City alongside but separate from Sundance); and High Life was his first production to premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival. Morris' films have been frequently feted as well: The Visit was nominated for four Spirit Awards and The Signal was nominated for The Cassavetes Spirit Award.

Morris is presently in post-production on four films, three of them are in 3D. He is also in production on a film shooting in South Africa, which is his second South African production after completing Master Harold and the Boys this year. He has a third film planned for South Africa which is expected to start shooting in the Spring.

Morris is CEO of Shoreline Entertainment which is a sales company, a production company and a management company. Shoreline is one of the longest running and most well respected production companies and worldwide sales agencies, with over eighteen years of experience in production and sales. They have offices in Los Angeles and Las Vegas and a library of approximately 200 titles. Per its participation at no fewer than ten major media markets a year, as well as most major film festivals, Shoreline positions itself to continuously meet with existing and prospective buyers.

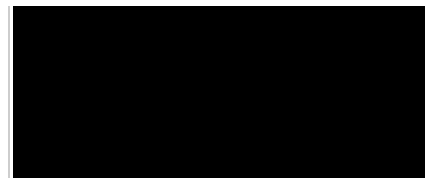
Shoreline has brought hundreds of films to the marketplace. This year Shoreline is representing two films in the Sundance Film Festival, a film in Rotterdam and another that was just invited to Berlin. Last year Shoreline represented two films in Sundance, Zona Sur and Undertow. Each won major awards; the World Cinema Directing and Screenwriting Awards going to the former, and the World Cinema Audience Award to the latter. During the festival, Shoreline acquired Homewrecker, which won the Best of Next Award. The year before, Shoreline had four films in Sundance including The Maid, which won the Grand Jury Prize in World Cinema, and was nominated for a 2010 Golden Globe for best Foreign Language Film. Last year Shoreline also represented two films in the Berlin Film Festival and had two films nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards, one of which won.

Discussion / Morris says:

I started on the creative side of the business. While I was at UCLA I wrote screenplays and was lucky enough to get one optioned. My first job was as a story analyst and because I spoke the same language as the writer and I appreciated the art of writing, I quickly became the director of development at the same company. I then went on to be the Vice President.

I started Shoreline in 1992 as a production company and had projects set up at the studios and with various sales companies and even a TV movie with Warner TV. Writers were getting paid but we weren't. Only one of those projects actually ended up getting made. I needed to figure out how to become a real business and it was either management or sales. I started a sales company because I had experience in working closely with a sales company on Glengarry Glen Ross. In fact, I learned a lot on the run about how to pull together an independent film, from financing to casting to production to post and marketing. Once we became a sales agency everything changed. We had two films in production within six months. I'm proud to say that every year we have continued to grow. The sales company is run by Sam Eigen who is our Executive Vice President and Brian Sweet who is Vice President of Sales. The sales department is a solid team of seven, handling sales, marketing, delivery and collections. They no longer need me. As a matter of fact they now know a lot more about the sales side of the business than I do which frees me up to focus on production and back to my roots of development. Interestingly enough, last year I decided to open a management company as well. Everything has come full circle.

Management makes sense because we deal with so many international companies that have the ability to finance or partially finance movies, but they often need better scripts. So we can pair up English speaking writers with companies in countries where English is not the first language. We also find international directors that we can introduce to Hollywood. When we acquire a finished film we often work with the director to help them take the next step forward with their career. That can



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International Sales Agent: Shoreline ha...

U.K. digital funding
U.K. Film Council - Digital
Screen Network

mean working with them to help develop and arrange financing on their next project. For example, we acquired a film called Last Goodbye, liked the director so much that we created a new project with him. That was The Signal.

EDUCATION & FILM SCHOOLS

Aalto University, Finland

With the studios making less films there is an opportunity for us as a company on the production side, the sales side and the management side. Distributors still need films and we can fill this void.

Bay Area Video Coalition

We're coming off a strong year with award winning films and a film that was nominated for a Golden Globe. We are trying to step things up on the production side and the acquisition side. We are working on a film that will star Hillary Duff and Kevin Zegers, plus we have three 3D animated films in post. I'm now developing more animation.

Beit Berl College of Art,
Israel

Binger Institut, Netherlands

I specialize in structuring deals that incorporate tax credits, deferrals, subsidies, sales and gap.

BFI Education - Kirikou and
the Sorceress U.K.

We've made films in England, Scotland, India, Romania, Canada, Mexico, China, Australia, South Africa, Puerto Rico, New York, Georgia, California, just to name a few. We are now gearing up to make a movie in New Zealand and another in Hungary. Right now I'm working on a \$15 million action, spy-thriller titled Department 13 that I've set up as a co-production between Germany and the UK. It was written and will be directed by a management client. We will shoot in Germany and post in the UK with 50% of our budget coming from Germany and the rest coming from a post equity deal in the UK, UK tax credits, pre-sales and gap. These are the films distributors want, especially since the studios are making less of these while focusing on tent pole films. We know what the distributors want because we talk to them regularly. As a sales company we have our finger on the pulse of the market.

Cambodia Bophana,
Cambodia

CILECT Association of
International Film Schools,
Belgium

Escuela de Cine Black
Maria, Colombia

Escuela de Cinema y
Audiovisual Comunidad de
Madrid (ECAM), Spain

We haven't lost touch with our art-house roots. In fact we are acquiring more foreign language films than ever and we have started a documentary division. We also recently produced Master Harold and the Boys which is based on the famous play by Athol Fugard. Between The Maid, Zona Sur and Undertow we have garnered a reputation in handling Spanish films and now we have the two new films in Sundance this year and O'Apostolo in post. O'Apostolo is a brilliant Spanish-language 3D stop motion animated film. We just did a huge deal for this film in Latin America where they are spending \$7 million to release the film theatrically. We are developing a film that will be shot in Mexico and Uruguay but made in English with the director of Zona Sur (a director we represent) that is based on the largest prison escape in history. All the prisoners are political prisoners - doctors, lawyers, engineers, family men. Citizens in the local town secretly coordinate with the prisoners to orchestrate a fantastic escape.

Escuela Internacional de
Cine y TV, Cuba

Fachhochschule Mainz,
Germany

Film Specific, U.S.

Ghetto Film School, N.Y.,
U.S.

L'atelier Ludwigsburg-
Paris, Germany, France

We started a Gap fund called Mind the Gap. It can come in and close the last 10 or 20% of the financing or we can use it as a sales advance to acquire larger, star-driven finished films. The fund has the comfort of having us as the sales company because we sell, deliver and collect.

La femis, France

Haiti Cine Institute, Haiti

There is a wonderful synchronicity that is happening between our sales, production and management divisions that is gaining momentum towards making more commercial films, while we still strive to acquire unique specialty films and genre films.

Jason's Blog from UCLA
Film School, U.S.

MEDIA Business School,
Spain

Peter Belsito (PB) – So what is going on in our world now? What do you see happening in the film business?

MEDIA Professional
Training

National Film and TV
School, U.K.

Morris Ruskin (MR) – We are in the middle of the digital revolution and I don't take the word "revolution" lightly. The way we communicate, socialize, market, research, sell, etc. has and continues to go through enormous change. When we look back at this we will realize that what we are going through now is bigger than the printing press. Consumer habits are changing right in front of our eyes. Of course, this effects the way movies are distributed. For example, UltraViolet is a new platform backed by most of the studios that will allow consumers to buy a movie or digital download and then watch it on your TV, computer, iPad, iPhone, game console or any other device you own. As a result we are seeing studios produce larger, tent-pole movies to draw in the masses, we are seeing the way movies are marketed change and we are seeing independent films seeking new distribution avenues.

National Film School Lodz,
Poland

New York University - Tisch
School of the Arts -
Graduate Film Division,
U.S.

Pontificia Universidad
Católica de Chile, Chile

PB – So what are you doing along three lines right now? Anything?

Power to the Pixel U.K.

MR – For us change is opportunity. All these new digital avenues create new revenue streams.

Skillset

Some of the older revenue streams are shrinking as new ones arise but the key is that these platforms all need product. We are in the business of producing content. So it is an opportunity for us to make and sell movies, shorts, documentaries, etc. Because the studios are making more expensive films, they are making less films. Distributors still need product, so the opportunity is getting even bigger. Consumers don't only want tent-pole films, so here is another opportunity—to deliver something more specialized. Most of the studios have shut down their independent distribution arm but audiences still want independent films. King's Speech is an example. As a result many small distribution companies have started up and they are looking to us for movies.

The European Graduate
School in Media and
Communications

There are good opportunities for niche films in terms of targeting demographics for marketing purposes. This is one reason Spanish Language films have been working for us. Last year we had a Spanish film with a gay theme that received a theatrical release. There is also opportunity for our management clients in terms of making content.

The Putnam School of
Film, U.K.

The Sam Spiegel Film and
TV School, Israel

Universidad Nacional de la
Plata, Argentina

Vietnam National University
Film Studies

PB – What other problems do you see?

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS
 ACE – Ateliers du Cinéma Européen
 European Film Promotion
 Cineregio (European network of regional film funds)
 Europa Distribution

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 Search Engine Review
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NEW MEDIA AND TRANSMEDIA
 Convergence Culture Consortium
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 Project New Media Literacies
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MR – It is difficult for independent films to get theatrical distribution because marketing costs are so high. Theatrical distribution is the leader in terms of marketing a film on other platforms such as Home Video. To combat this we have to make quality niche independent films as they have a better chance of theatrical distribution. We can also make movies for a specific platform—for example the SyFy Channel and channels similar to this in other countries. A film festival strategy can be a form of a theatrical release. We seek, cultivate, encourage media exposure at festivals and that's very valuable to our marketing. Once in a while you may have a hit like Paranormal Activity but for most small budget films it is okay to play in festivals and then be available world-wide on Cable TV, VOD, digital platforms, DVD, Airlines, Hotels, etc.

PB – What else is new?

MR – The art-house distributors that we see cropping up pay less which means we have to make art-house movies for less. New cameras and editing systems allow us to do this. These movies have to be innovative and unique. There is no point in competing with the studios. We try make films that have a chance of catching on, getting into the top festivals, getting a theatrical release and finding an audience.

I also see the studios making less of the medium budget films. New Line used to make these years ago. We are developing thrillers and action films that can be made for \$15 Million and under. Shoreline has always been doing things 'on our own', pushing the envelope for new ways to work and succeed with our films. We are entrepreneurial and we are able to adapt quickly to change. Not only are we entrepreneurs but also all the distributors in every country are entrepreneurs that are coming up with new ideas and opportunities during this time of great change. With all these people working on new ideas, we are only seeing the beginning of the digital revolution. These are exciting times.

SydneyLevine posted to [Awards](#), [Distribution](#), [Independents](#), [International Film Festival](#), [Sundance](#), [People](#), [International Sales Agent](#), [Producers to Watch](#), [Special Interest](#), [Latino](#) at 10:30 am on January 22, 2011 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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SCREEN RUSH

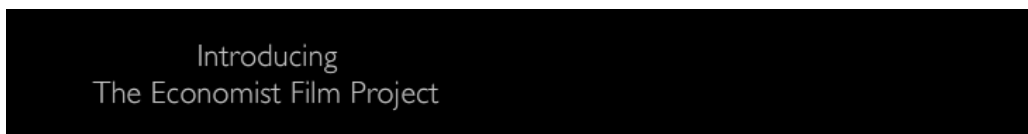
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Women and Hollywood

Introducing Women and Hollywood 2.0 >
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 Question: Who Has Two Movies in the Top 10 This Weekend? >



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