

American Film Market, The #1 “Season” for Networking in LA!



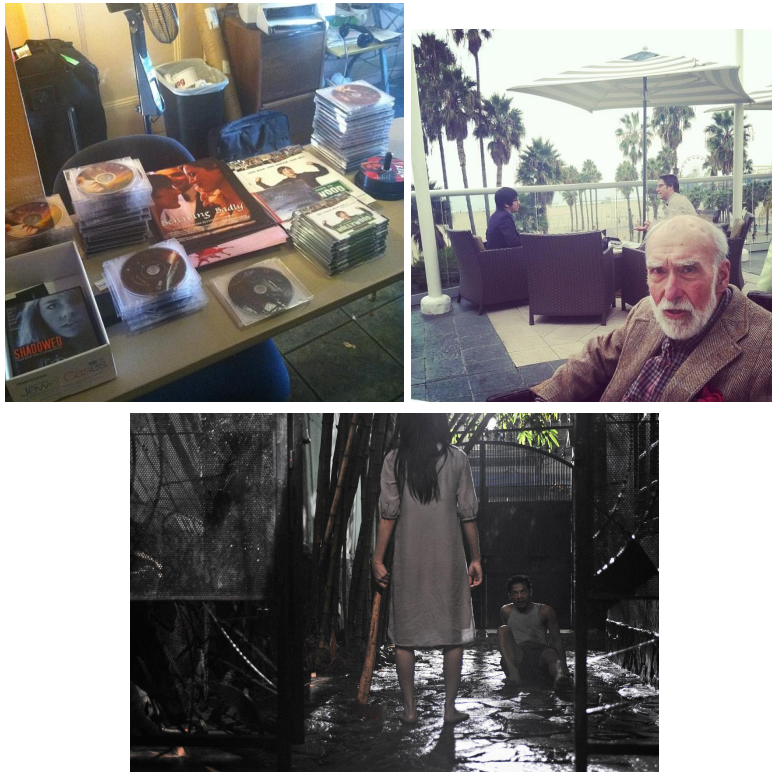
In the Los Angeles film scene, work is play and play is work. Usually, the people who excel at both that move to the top. Contacts are important in any profession. In the entertainment industry, having contacts is so important that it actually *is* a profession. It's several professions. Agents, managers, distributors, exhibitors, and aggregators all get paid in part to acquire and maintain their contacts.

But the word, “networking,” seems to transform any event into a never ending awkward pitch fest that no one wants to hear. Are there any events in Los Angeles where networking isn't a four letter word?

The American Film Market (AFM) is a perfect place to shake up that perspective. And it trumps every other event in Los Angeles, and the entire United States if you're looking to make moves in the industry. Attend every year you will build a network of true friends and real contacts from about 100 countries.

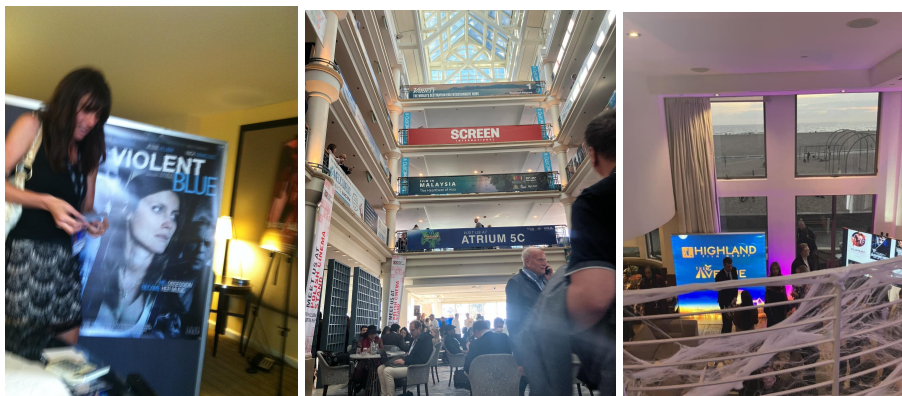


There are only six big film markets: Cannes, Berlin, Hong Kong, Toronto, and The American Film Market in Los Angeles. Every November, about 8,000 distributors and film financiers' "buyers" fly in, take over every hotel and restaurant on Ocean Boulevard, and flood the Loews Hotel in Santa Monica for a week with one mission: acquire content.



Like experienced miners looking for gold, buyers sort through a week of screenings and meetings, all the while wrestling with producers shoving postcards and trailers in their faces, combing desperately for the right films. And if they can't snap up the best ones before their competitors, they could lose their jobs.

Over 1 billion dollars of deals are signed inside the temporarily converted hotel rooms.



But the real work of attracting a buyer doesn't happen in the offices. It doesn't even happen at the market's peak. The "season" of AFM really starts in September with the first round emails and calls, along with a film's artwork, trailers, pitch decks, scripts, and screeners. Does this mean you need \$10,000 for a booth or at least \$350 a day for a ticket? Absolutely not!

Many of these power players aren't spending that money either. Why should they, if they can meet a contact for free over at Bruno's next door and talk films over a pizza and bottle of overpriced wine. You may meet just as many buyers at The Viceroy, The Merigot, or any hotel or restaurant close by. The business is contained in a bubble as no one leaves "the strip" until their work is done. A slice of ocean boulevard has been transported into an international film hub, with movie posters plastered all over the buildings. People even cluster in groups chain smoking, something you never see in Santa Monica.

For a good market you really only need two things. You need to register for AFM for at least one day to access the exhibitors who have taken over every room of the hotel.



And you need a Cinando account (conveniently included for all AFM registrants). Run by the Cannes Film Market, Cinando is the world's largest database for sales agents, exhibitors, and buyers. Like IMDB, a user can use search filters to quickly and accurately target the right people. You can see every company attending; what they do, where they're from, what type of content they buy, what countries they buy from, what platforms they reach, and a list of staff, including the acquisitions representative or team, with a big "AFM" sticker slapped on the ones that will be at the market.



Cinando is a blizzard of contacts. The emails and phone numbers of pretty much everyone who acquires or buys at the market are posted below their smiling photos .

Three weeks before the market starts, you'll gather your pitch materials and start emailing the people you want to meet with the most. It doesn't matter who you are, if you have an agent or not, credits or not, or who you know already. Title your email "AFM meeting request" with a hint towards the project. Target your pitches to match the company's needs, and someone will read it. If they're interested, they will respond. Or if they don't, one confident phone call can easily shift their focus your way.

Once the market starts, all bets are off. You plan your best, and then surrender to the energy of this frantic "speed dating" for films. The lobby looks more like a huge party. Executive and filmmakers laugh together by the cozy wood paneled bar. Or they casually wander outside to the lounge tables (each with their own fireplace) overlooking the sky-blue pool and the Pacific herself. Is this drinking and chatter really needed to sell a movie? Sometimes, often, yes it is. Just like you can't shoot a movie without a camera operator who has specialized, you can't make a bug film deal without the sales agents who network for a living.



This is how business and pleasure intermingle. Personality, likeability, trust, and character are determined as buyers suss out who they want to work with as much as which films they want.



AFM is unlike any other “networking event” in Los Angeles. The fantasy is real here. People really do come to The American Film Market on one level and leave on another. Possibility infuses the air, and everyone is a little giddy because of it. The wine doesn’t hurt the mood either.



Adding to the mix, promoters zip through the crowd, doing their best to make sure everyone in the lobby knows about their film. These promoters range from the tame (people with the same t-shirt) to the extreme (Asian models in bloody school girl skirts handing out postcards for Asylum’s latest gore bath). At 6:15 pm every night, the lobby opens for anyone. Actors, writers, directors and revelers bombard the bar, right as the “day” for office meetings ends.

You can feel the excitement mix with the excessive liquor in the lobby from 4 - 10 every night. After a long day watching trailers, these power player decision makers are ready to drink! Fortunately, there is no shortage of people looking to drink with them.

You can go to a bar any night and maybe strike up a few conversations. But if you're looking to expand your social circle in Los Angeles, you need to think out of the box. At the American Film Market, you're in a place where everyone wants to talk to you, people are looking to collaborate.

Just stand there with a drink and soon, you'll be in a hotel suite with a group of people from Denmark or at an after party with an amazing new filmmaker about to blow up.



You don't even have to be cool, charming, or at all in the know to find the good parties. Just follow the large groups of people with badges., all wearing badges, all walking towards the same place. Los Angeles is never this easy! Wherever you end up, the night will have a charge that can't be matched.