

CREATING SUCCESS WITH YOUR SUBMISSIONS

by Anthony Straeger



SUBMISSIONS



OPEN

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Congratulations on submitting to Berlin Sci-fi Filmfest. This short pamphlet will help you improve your submission content and help you with submission to other festivals. By following these guidelines you will be able to create the best impression possible and one that will assist your film on platforms like FilmFreeway.

I've submitted to hundreds of festivals over the years, without success. Most rejections have come without explanation as to why? It might not have been that my film is no good. My film might have been better than good, but there are many factors why it failed.

For many filmmakers the festival circuit is hard to navigate. It will come as no surprise that finding suitable film festivals can be daunting. As a result, the success rate for many filmmakers is often low. I can testify to this from my own submissions experience.

It is important to research via the platform every festival that you like or want to submit to. You need to check that your film fulfils the criteria of the festival. Look out for things like:

Genre specifics: Is it Documentary based, Science Fiction. Think of it like walking around a bookshop looking for a certain genre of book.

Festival theme: Climate Change, Political, Science Factual, Green.

Protocols: Look at the types of procedure they go through and the system of rules they have in place.

Do you have to have a premiere status with them?
Something like, first screening in Europe, USA, UK etc.
This may help them decide to screen your film as it is an angle they can promote.

Is there a time limit as to when your film was complete
ie: Your film has to be completed in the last 5, 3, 2 years.

Making Film Festival submissions is a numbers game. How much you can budget to play that 'Numbers Game' is decided by how deep your pockets really are. Fees range from zero to high, depending on the type of festival, its size, its Kudos, etc. If you're looking for ways to ease the strain on your festival budget, here are ten things to consider.

One extra point to think about If the festival is an ONLINE ONLY festival, it probably is a scam, bogus or dodgy festival. Check their profile on the platform, their website and social media. Research the person running it, that will also give you an idea if they are genuine or not.

5 Warning Signals a Film Festival is not legitimate

- No public film screenings
- Instead of film screenings, the 'festival' hosts awards dinners and offers prizes. To attend, or to receive your award, this will cost you a fee.
- Long call for entries (around 1 year). This is not always the case, but most festivals don't have time to watch films all year, so this indicates that making money is the first priority of the festival.
- Almost all film festivals are run in the area in which they are held. So watch out for phone numbers with area codes that don't correspond to the area in which the festival is held, or numbers that no longer work when you call.
- If there's no evidence of previous editions online, they probably haven't had one. Do a quick search on Google to find out.

If it is online only they are just making money out of submissions.

Before submitting to a film festival it is important to have everything ready and in place. There are many submission portals, and you need to research each of them. Then you can choose one that you can identify with most. Here is (probably) the top six:

- FilmFreeway
- FestHome
- Without-a-box
- Festival Focus
- Shortfilmdepot
- Filmfestivallife

Each ones layout is different, but they all need the same core information. This has to be prepared in advance, so it becomes a simple cut-and-paste or image/video upload up. Here's what you should prepare before you start looking at festivals.

N.B. Spell check and grammar check everything.

DON'T TREAT FESTIVALS AS AN AFTER THOUGHT!

You've worked done your budget, planned your script, completed pre-production and shot the film. But thought about submissions and submission fees after the fact!

Early on it is important to plan and estimate how much you can afford. Submission fees, travel expenses and festival miscellany will need to be account for early on in your production budget.

Knowing the potential bills you might incur is helpful. How big they're likely to be during your festival run is hard to guess. But if you prepare a ballpark figure, you can make a more informed spending decision.

So what do you need?

1 – THE FILM

Before you do start the festival submission round, it is incredibly important to make sure your film is really, really finished:

Final, Final Edit – Sound Design – Music & Clearances – Titles – Grading

Please note I have added a special section after this on Titling, this section is just about the film itself.

OUTPUT

Once you are certain and happy you will need to load it up to VIMEO, YOUTUBE or FILMFREEWAY. Do this at the best resolution possible and password protected. Many festivals use films uploaded to VIMEO. But, because of the way compressions run, make sure your Codex is in line with the platform. Or you may find glitches and the possibility that it may be out of sync. Check it for glitches after uploading.

DCP

If you are submitting to festivals that take place in a cinema you will need to get a DCP created. It is possible to make one yourself via software like DCP-O-Matic. But make sure you check them so that there is no issue with the data. This can be done by download something like DCP-O-Matic Player.

SUBTITLES

All filmmakers should create English Subtitles for their film. And if it is in another language, do them for the hard of hearing. With a MOV/MP4 file it is best to embed them. Creating an SRT file is easy with software like Aegisub, Debut or Jubler.

TRAILER/TEASER

Depending on how long your film is, it's no bad thing to have a teaser. My last short film was 4 minutes and didn't need one. But having a 30-second teaser can be used to promote both film and festival.

N.B. Always make sure it is downloadable for the festival. There is the possibility they may choose to use it in their Teaser trailer.

2 – CREDITS and SPECIFICATION SHEET

Make sure you checked and recheck your film information. Create a specification and credit listed in word doc before you start submitting. This will help in saving time in the long run and you can add the information to your EPK (Electronic Press Kit) – See later on.

N.B. You save a lot of time by having the obvious things prepared.

There are two things that can be very annoying, at the front of the queue

OPENING TITLES: It is unnecessary to create a long opening title sequence for a short film. Unless it's integrated into the story don't bother with them, get into the story. That is what your audience wants!

STARRING: One other thing that is amateurish is putting the words 'STARRING' for someone who is not a star. If you have a celebrity/named actor in – Great! Then you are taking the opportunity to use them as a promotional tool for the film. But otherwise it is plain silly.

CLOSING CREDITS: Something that may get your film rejected is long closing credits. We have had short film with long opening credit and a long final credit section. It kills the film! It bores the audience! And is uninteresting to anyone other than the cast and crew. Save it for the website and team download. Keep them LESS THAN 1 Minute!

Think about the audience sitting through a 10 film short programme. If each film has three minutes of credits, they have to sit through 30-minutes of credits in a 90-minute session. It spoils the entertainment.

3 – DIRECTORS STATEMENT AND PHOTOGRAPH

DIRECTORS PHOTOGRAPH: The director needs to have a well-shot, well-lit headshot photograph. From a festival's point of view, they want to see whom they are dealing with. I would have a 12" x 8" photograph made (you probably have a set photographer on your shoot. Get him to do something for you).

N.B. Don't send a cartoon image or picture of the Predator, or you tongue sticking your tongue out whilst giving the devil sign. Not professional.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT: No excuses, you need one like it or not. A director's statement is about what inspires someone to make a movie. It is about what they want to convey to an audience. It should express their inspirations, ambitions and generate excitement about the film. The length should be between 150 and 300 words long. It is best to keep it on the shorter side if you can.

Your statement is useful for many things from press and marketing. But as necessary as it is, no one will program your movie in a festival because you wrote a winning Director's Statement, it's just a great help.

If your film doesn't appeal to them, they're not going to change your mind because of your Statement. Once they decide to program/review/distribute your film. They will look at the Director's Statement to help them with promotion. From a journalists/film critic's stand point; a good Director's Statement saves them the hassle of having to interview you.

In this form of Directors Statement, the key things you should consider including are:

- The genesis of the project
- Why the project is important
- Why you're the only one who could have told this story
- Your cinematic inspiration and influences
- Production and Post-production discoveries. What happened during the process of making the film that shaped the film's final state
- Your hopes for the audience's response

4 – YOUR STORY

LOGLINE: This is very useful when writing the festival program. The story in under 20 - 25 words is a BIG help.

SHORTY SYNOPSIS – We wasted a lot of time chasing filmmakers for a short synopsis. Sometimes we have little chose other than to write them ourselves. This is not our job!

Why does a festival need this?

A key selling point/overview to the content of the session is in the festival program. Most film festivals put one together for online and as a physical program. This is because the audience is not familiar with the films. The cinema we work with has a specific way of putting together its online and printed program. We have no choice but to stick with their system, which is why we are specific about how we like the presentation be given and sent to us.

Here is an example from our program:

22:30 – Feature Program - *The Spiral* (Horror/Thriller) Malaysia 2018, 91 minutes – A respected lecturer disappears. Three months later he resurfaces & massacres a group of people in a café. What happened and why is a mystery.

WE WANT: Title – Genre – Country of Origin – Year of completions – length – Logline (under 25 words).

As a guide to putting together a strong hook-line you need:

1. The protagonist
2. Their goal
3. The antagonist/antagonistic force

USE AN ADJECTIVE TO GIVE A LITTLE DEPTH TO THAT CHARACTER

This is your chance to show some character, but beware of clichés, and also of the power of irony. It's helpful if the characteristic you describe will have something to do with the plot.

- An alcoholic ex-superhero

CLEARLY AND QUICKLY PRESENT THE PROTAGONISTS MAIN GOAL

This is what drives your story and it will drive your logline too. Make sure that the goal is present early in the script. If you don't make good on your logline's promise early enough the rest of the script won't get read.

- An alcoholic ex-superhero searches for his daughter

DESCRIBE THE ANTAGONIST

The antagonist should be described in a similar, but shorter, manner than the hero. If the hero faces a more general antagonistic force, make it clear that they are really battling something.

- An alcoholic ex-superhero searches for his daughter after being kidnapped by his demented, jealous former sidekick.

MAKE SURE YOUR PROTAGONIST IS PROACTIVE

He or she should drive the story and do it with vigour. Good loglines will show the action of the story, the narrative momentum that carries you through the script. In some cases the protagonist will be reactive, but note, this is not the same as passive.

INCLUDE THE STAKES

The stakes are very useful narrative devices that add urgency to your script. If they fit in easily, include them in your logline.

- To save his reputation a secretly gay frat-boy must sleep with 15 women by the end-of-semester party.

Do not reveal the script's ending. The story and thus the logline/short synopsis is your hook and should be good enough to hold up by its self. A surprise ending should be a bonus.

This wasn't the best example in the world, but it is aimed at pointing you in the right direction.

5 – SYNOPSIS

A synopsis is nothing more than a short description of your screenplay. It is a plot summary containing less than 400 words. For most festivals it is best to keep it under 250 words and down to a 150 for a very good length.

A synopsis highlights your main characters and what they go through in your story. A good synopsis will focus a lot of attention to conflict and resolution.

Questions you should ask yourself:

- Does my synopsis give a producer/programmer an accurate view of my story?
- Is my synopsis easy to understand or is it too complicated to read?
- Is my synopsis bogged down with too many unimportant or unnecessary details?

6 – POSTER

The standard size for a movie poster is 27 inches by 40 inches (686 x 1040 mm) in portrait format. This size is one inch longer than the modern one sheet display (aka Half-sheet), 22 inches by 28 inches (559 x 711 mm). I would recommend doing this format and NOT the landscape format for consistency. Set the Margin on all sides to 35 mm and introduce a bleed on all sides of 10 mm.

Often filmmakers imagine their poster is going to be displayed full size outside the biggest and best cinemas in the world. But, this is not likely to be the case. More often than not, they will be a thumbnail on IMDB or small image in an online press release. They will of course be featured on the festival website displayed with the other selected film posters. So if it isn't bold and clear it can be lost on the page.

It is very important in the process of preparing your film for marketing is to consider how it looks and works in different scales. Here are my tips for making your poster stand out:

- Try a Google image search for movie posters. Many use a black, grey or blue/green background! Unless you have a very graphic image, avoid this if you can and unusual colours to highlight your point.
- Keep your design high-contrast. Monochromatic shades can be lovely, but your poster may well end up looking like a blob when shrunk down.
- Avoid using a white or very light background unless you have included a border. These images become lost when printed on a white background in a festival program.

- The title of your film should be in a large, clear font. They must be readable when your poster is shrunk to two inches high. If you have an image behind your title text, check how it views when reduced in size. Does the prints remains legible?
- Your poster should be in portrait orientation. Most film festival programmers will resize all the poster images to the same width for consistency. If your poster is in landscape, you'll wind up with a much smaller image than everyone else.
- Make sure you have a good selection of graphic files to send to a film festival. You want one that is a clear PNG for printing and that looks good when printed at 24" x 36" and at 8 1/2" x 11". You also want a basic JPG that looks clear when shrunk to about 2" x 1"

7 – NECESSARY INFORMATION

COVER LETTER - What does it need to be?

Short, well written and amusing is always a good start. But it is also important to be specific. State why you think your film is suitable or what relevance it has to the festival. Is there one point that actually makes your film remarkable!

In 2019 we had one feature film that had been shot over seven years and the result was outstanding. The remarkable part was that the continuity for such a low budget well made film was amazingly accurate.

It has often been said that nobody ever reads them! That is an urban legend a similar to the statement, making a movie on RED will make your movie better!

Don't think of a cover letter as extra work, think of it as a connection to the Festival Programmers. I've already stated that it is **IMPORTANT TO RESEARCH FESTIVALS BEFORE YOU SUBMIT**. You have to know your purpose, do your research, narrow your submissions list and write to each festival personally for the best results.

YOUR DETAIL: Make sure these items are accurate and up-to-date:

Your Email – Telephone number – address

The number of incorrect emails, phone number and in accurate address is hard to believe. Why spend good money submitting, if in the end the festival cannot get through to you?

Other information to add to the festival platforms is as follows with examples:

CREDITS:

- Director
- Writers
- Producers
- Sound
- Editor
- Music
- Main Leads: Key Cast 3 – 6 most

SPECIFICATIONS:

I have added a fake example.

- Film Type: Feature
- Genres: Mockumentary, Comedy, Thriller
- Runtime: 80 minutes
- Completion Date: 01-01-2020
- Production Budget: 5,000 euros
- Country of Origin: Germany
- Country of Filming: Germany
- Film Language (s): English, German
- Shooting Format: Aspect Ratio: 16:9
- Film Colour: Colour
- First-time Filmmaker: No
- Student Project: No

STILLS: Make sure that the festival can download a zip of your stills. I personally think the stills package should include:

- 1 – Directors Headshot
- 2 – Film Poster
- 3 – 2 to 3 stills from the film
- 4 – 2 to 3 'making of...' stills

(EPK) ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT

With this information put together you can create your **(EPK) ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT**. A good EPK can get you to festivals, boost your crowd-funding and maybe land you a distribution deal. It usually exists as a downloadable document (PDF); it's not solely aimed at the press.

You can use it to enhance your website. And it is a powerful tool for marketing, fundraising and pitching your film. Start planning your EPK at the very beginning. Collect stills, interviews and making-of material and put them in a Production file. The more you have the easier it is to create a buzz, either via your website or possible crowd funding campaign.

The level of EPK's out there varies with no correlation to film budgets. A good press kit is going to help sell the film. So focus on including the important information. If you have a good hook or USP then use that. Perhaps you have already been picked up for a serious awards or selections by a top festival. Maybe you have already generated a buzz that will help sell tickets.

Here are some things that should definitely be in your EPK:

• Trailer • Poster • Stills for press • Logline • Synopsis – short version • Bios • Contacts, social media, website, etc.

In addition you could include: Frequently asked questions.

Make a list of 8 – 10 questions interviewers might ask you about your film. Some can be generic and some specific to the production or film itself. It gives lazy journalists something to copy and paste. It is also a good starting point if you end up at a festival doing a Q&A session.

CONCLUSION

That's it. The aim of this short document is to help you the filmmaker. Maybe you know a lot of this already, but with a few tweaks you could increase your chances of success.

We deal with hundreds of submissions and it is amazing how many are badly presented. Many submitters provided us with incomplete or inaccurate information. By taking my own advice I increased my own success rate from 1 in 15 to 6 in 10! That is a significant improvement. Especially when you are spending quite a lot on submissions.

Berlin Sci-Fi Filmfest is all about the filmmakers, and helping them achieve. I hope this helps you.

RECAP

FILM

Subtitles: SRT file – English and original language

Credits: Make sure the end credits are less than 2 minutes for a feature and 1 minute for shorts.

MOV: Create an MOV file with the subtitles burned in.

DCP: Create a DCP.

TRAILER: Loaded on Vimeo – 1 minute to 2 minutes maximum.

VIMEO: A useful platform for hosting your films and trailers.

EPK DOCUMENT: This is an exclusive document with important information about your film. You won't need it for all festivals necessarily, because you should have put this on the project page. But it is necessary for sales agents and distributors.

FILMFREEWAY PLATFORM REQUIREMENT:

OVERVIEW: Posters & set stills – Make them downloadable.
Social Media & Website
Trailer
Director's statement
Logline
Short synopsis

This will also have your submitters details:

Name of Submitter – Email – Telephone – Address – DOB –Gender

CREDITS: as stated above.

SPECIFICATIONS: as stated above.

COVER LETTER: Often a good touch but depends on who you are targeting and why. If I invite you with a discount, etc. then use this as part of it.

FINAL NOTE:

- Look for Festivals that a right for your film
- Create a WATCH LIST
- Create a SUBMISSION TRACKING FORM (see next page)
- Submit Early
- Look for Bargains and Waivers (Check the FilmFreeway DEALS tab)
- Use your successes and Keep your Social media alive
- Stay within your budget

BERLIN SCI-FI FILMFEST

27 & 28 November 2020

(Germany's First & Premiere International Sci-fi Film Festival)

THE MISSION

Berlin Sci-fi Filmfest is now in its 4th Year and we offer a platform for Independent Sci-fi Filmmakers to present their work on the big screen and to a live audience in one of the most beautiful and world famous cinemas in Berlin – The Babylon, where Metropolis was first screened in 1927. We are looking to expand the horizons of the festival to make it more interesting, more international and more filmmaker friendly.

Over the last three years we have shown over 300 films from 38 different countries. Our festival was the first genre specific Sci-fi film festival in Germany. We are passionate about film making and are interested in all things Sci-fi from geek interest, documentary, web-series, narrative, animation, music, experimental, fan-films, in fact all things Science Fiction.

Our festival is evolving, we are adding more events and attractions as we go. We are pleased to host our regular Cosplayers and are looking to extend our events with workshops, Q&A sessions with filmmakers and book readings and exhibitions. It is a 'Sci-fi fun-fest' that takes place over Friday and Saturday on the last weekend of November. We believe we have something for every science fiction fan.

FESTIVAL TEAM

Alexander Pfander - Festival Director

Is a scriptwriter, director & creator of films and series, with a strong interest in storytelling and new world creating. My media experience includes editing and post-production and is the creator of the award winning Sci-fi Webseries, Mission Backup Earth. As a Sci-fi fan he wants to connect filmmakers and audiences by showcasing work from around the world. WEBSITE

Anthony Straeger - Festival Director

Has been in the business for over 30 years, both as an actor and filmmaker. He feels it's a joy to be part of the launch of this festival. He has a love of both Horror and Sci-Fi with his first feature film being Call of the Hunter a low budget horror, but relatively successful movie. Since then he has been involved in writing and producing a number of projects. WEBSITE

CONTACT DETAILS

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Further information & film submissions

[@www.filmfreeway.com/festival/BerlinScienceFictionFilmFestival](http://www.filmfreeway.com/festival/BerlinScienceFictionFilmFestival)

PLEASE CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT BEFORE PRINTING THIS EMAIL



Berlin Sci-fi
Filmfest
2020

*Thank you Anthony. It's really helpful!
Longwei Deng*

*This is great thank you. I've read it over
and it seems like a trailer, letter to the festival
and directors statement would be three key things
to add to my submission and will do so this week.
Lauren R. Fritz*

*This is very helpful. Thankyou.
Deirdre Bound*

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For more information about anthony Straeger
visit www.anthonystraeger.com