Get Bigger Audiences for Cultural Cinema at Your Venue: Twelve Top Tips

1. Think about film as part of a bigger programme

Cultural 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? If your organisation can’t put on any more events, can you work with other people who can: Weight Watchers? Tumbletots?

1. Don’t confuse them - programme regularly

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.

1. Most of the audience for cultural 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 you film enthusiasts but there is huge potential to grow your audience by persuading arts enthusiasts to include the occasional cultural film on their menu.

1. Don’t assume knowledge

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 cultural 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.

1. Don’t restrict access

Only one in five ticket buyers for cultural 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.

1. Put your cultural film programme in context

People start getting interested in film because they want to be entertained. So, programming some appropriate mainstream and crossover films alongside the cultural film programme helps to build audiences.

1. Target arts enthusiasts

Most ticket buyers for cultural 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.

1. Persuade people to take risks

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

1. Put cultural film under the noses of arts enthusiasts

Put your films in your main season brochure. Don’t create a cultural 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.

1. Be persuasive

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.

1. Be visible

Online, six times more people use the word “cinema” and seven times more people use “movies” than use “film”. 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 “movies”, “cinema” or “film” in your area

1. Know what’s great about seeing film in your venue

Cinema is not just about the film – it’s an 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.