

Money Train's Two Cents Review:

Hollywood Black Film Financing & Distribution Summit

February 5, 2007



I told an agent friend of mine, whom is black, that I was going to the 2007 Hollywood Black Film Festival Film & Distribution Financing Summit. The agent got all sour and asked, "Why was I doing that"? As if watching paint dry on a wall would be a better use of one's time. I ignored the agent's comment and said I was going anyway because of one fact. And that is that Tanya Kersey's Hollywood Black Film Festival regularly puts on some of the best infotainment conferences of any film festival I have attended. And that goes for black ones and white run ones like Sundance, AFI and the Los Angeles Film Festival. Even though this was HBFF's first Film Financing & Distribution Summit I had no qualms that it would be well run professional event. This was based solely on my experience at Tanya's past HBFF infotainment conferences. The summit was held at UCLA's De Neve Plaza. And after a brief hike up a few hills I found it already in progress. It started on time and the venue was packed with folks wanting to get more knowledge and insights about the business. Even if I think I know it all about Hollywood I still like to go to panels and workshops.



All of the summit's panelists were highly knowledgeable, credible and honest about securing bank financing, alternatives for raising capital, finding a suitable distributor, how to use the Internet for marketing one's film, what are the proper ways to set up a film loan company or film business plan to secure investors and how to pitch films.

There were four panels and a luncheon speaker. The summit started at 9:00 am and did not end until after 6:00. I'll breakdown what they were about and who was on the panels after my commentary. Even if you did not attend HBFF's summit one could still look at the panel topics and the panelists and find valuable contacts. The panels were well spaced out to about 80 minutes each with 20 to 30 minutes for audience Q&A time. What ruins these type of infotainment panels at other festivals is that they make them so short or stacked up one after the other—Digital Hollywood as an example—that there is not much interaction with the panelists and the people that paid to hear them. The whole point of attending these Industry events is to be able to gain something—facts, perspectives or experiences that you have not experienced.

That leads me to an overall important question of who should have been at the Hollywood Black Film Festival Film Financing & Distribution Summit. I fully understand why a lot of middle class black folks who are trying to get into the business would pay a fair fee and sit attentively all day listening to panel after panel of speakers. But what floors me the most is that I know no matter when I go to an infotainment conference—black or white run—the people whom I will see the least are students. They could be from high school or college. Why spend \$50 G's a semester at USC to go to film school when you cannot spend a \$150 to go to a conference to learn more in a day than you will while you are school. It is not that you cannot pick up the same facts and statistics in a classroom, but it is actually seeing living breathing person in the biz that one can pitch projects, locate funds or be a future contact if that person blows up. Hollywood is all about who you know and don't. And the money for a Jaime Foxx concert is what the HBFF summit costs.



I wish when I was in film school at USC so many years ago that there was a HBFF film summit to go to. Today it is amazing how many black students are interested in being in the film business, but spend years and years in school not making any real practical contacts. I also have to fault many upcoming “wannabe” black film writers, producers and directors, who are so busy working on their latest projects that they did not show up. Now I know there were many creative types at the summit, but I could easily think of 20 to 30 filmmakers who always ask me for advice like: securing bank financing, alternatives for raising capital, finding a suitable distributor, how to use the Internet for marketing one’s film, what are the proper ways to set up a film loan company or film business plan to secure investors and how to pitch films. This is exactly the same stuff that was talked about at the summit. I never get why I can be there, but so many that really need the advice or contacts are not there, too.

Tanya also had an impressive HBFF summit folder that contained Film Finance & Distribution terminology, The Film Entrepreneur Newsletter, A Film Business Plan Breakdown, bios of all the summit’s panelists and some other Industry coupons and brochures. Overall I have to stress that I had a great time at the summit and would highly recommend HBFF hosting a second one next year. I would only suggest they make a better effort of getting the local colleges and high schools involved. Because we need more minority students learning about the business before they leave college. I should say that I told off the agent about how we all need to stick together and support various black entertainment events. But this is the real world. That never happens. Those of us that are black in the Industry show up at these types of infotainment conferences because we are usually on a panel. If we are not on a panel, then most likely we are not showing up. And what we miss are meeting people who most likely have great ideas, but not all the skills or resources to get their projects going in the right direction. Learning new ideas and new contacts makes filmmakers better. The 2007 Hollywood Black Film Festival Film Financing Summit was a great success and so will the 2007 Hollywood Black Film Festival.

2007 HBFF Film Financing & Distribution Summit Panel Breakdown:

The 9:00 am Session 1: **Where's The Money**. The summary is as follows: A stellar panel of leading film financing and packaging experts who will discuss the latest trends and developments in film financing and private equity, Wall Street's renewed interest in film financing, utilizing commercial bankers to secure financing, and other creative strategies Independent filmmakers can utilize to attract financing for their film projects. The panel includes experts in law, tax, bank financing and film distribution.

Moderator:

Mychale A. Wilson, Esq., Mindfusion Law

Panelists:

Brenda Doby-Flewellyn, Partner, FilmBankers International, LLC

Lonnie Ramati, President, R&B Entertainment Management

Marion Spiegelman, Senior V.P.,

Tony Thomas, Vice President Syncom Management Company, Inc. &

Vice President. Syncom II, Syncom III, General Partner, Syncom IV.

Adrian Ward, Vice President Portfolio Management, Imperial Capital Bank

The 11:00 am Session 2: **Packaging Your Film & Creating A Winning Business Plan**. The summary is as follows: Features a panel of business consultants, attorneys and producer's reps who will discuss creating effective business reps who will discuss creating an effective package (business plans, budgets, letters of intent, treatment, script), who to raise private equity funds and how profits are generated to a film.

Moderator:

Gary A. Watson, Esq.

Panelists:

Paul Battista, Esq., MindFusion Law

Louise Levison, Film Finance Consultant, President, Business Strategies

Page Ostrow, Producer's Rep, Ostrow and Copmany

Anthony Smith, Senior Financial Analyst, First Look Studios

W. Steven Temple, L.R.A., B.S., M.S., E.A, President & CFO, Business Affairs Management

12:30 pm. Luncheon Session: Speaker – Peter Broderick, President Paradigm Consulting

Paradigm Consulting helps filmmakers and media companies develop strategies to maximize distribution, audience and revenues.

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The 2:00 pm Session 3: **Strategies For Distributing Your Film**. The summary is as follows: The panel will discuss streaming and downloads and cell phone distribution of film and video, as well as opportunities for filmmakers to produce for their new distribution channels.

Moderator:

Greg S. Bernstein, Esq.

Panelists:

Marvinia Anderson, International Sales Agent, Anderson International
Relani Belous, Director Business and Legal Affairs, Worldwide Television
Distribution, MGM

Mark Borde, Partner Freestyle Releasing, President, Innovation Film Group

Jerome Courshon, President, Centaur Productions

John Schneck, President, Regent Studios/Regent Entertainment

The 4:00 pm Session 4: What Are The Buyers Looking For? The summary is as follows: Representatives from studio, cable and independent production and distribution companies explain the scope of their companies, their financing structures, how to approach these companies, what products they are producing, the types of projects they acquire and the different stages they get involved.

Moderator:

Bobby Mardis, Filmmaker

Panelists:

David Bixler, SVO, Acquisitions, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

Jeff Clanagan, CEO/President, CodeBlack Entertainment

Eva Davis, Vice President, Targeted Acquisitions & Marketing, Warner
Home Entertainment

Brett Dismuke, Executive Director, UrbanWorks Entertainment

Danny Rodriguez, CEO/President Polychrome Pictures

John Scott, SVP, Acquisitions, Genius Products



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Earlybird Deadline: January 15, 2007
Final Deadline: February 15, 2007

HBFF 2007
Beverly Hills, California
June 5 - June 10, 2007

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