4 Lessons Entrepreneurs Can Learn From Filmmakers



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Filmmakers are a force to be reckoned with, as it is not an easy feat to put their productions together. In fact, there is much entrepreneurs can stand to learn from filmmakers, considering that they not only have to bring their creative idea to life, but then have to market it, get distribution, find an audience and pay back investors. Their role is ultimately quite similar to that of an entrepreneur.

Here are the top four lessons any founder can learn from filmmakers.

Marketing and distribution for films needs to be strategically planned out and executed during production, not once the

project is complete. “Marketing your film requires a long-term strategy,” confirms Jia Wertz, a documentary filmmaker whose recent release, *Conviction*, has played at numerous worldwide festivals. “It takes a significant amount of pre-planning, including identifying who your audience is, what their interests are and where they consume content. A clearly defined marketing strategy is the roadmap for success. A gripping trailer won’t cut it alone. A social media strategy, press outreach, surveying potential audiences, navigating film festivals and community screenings are all part of the recipe.”

Just like product development in the entrepreneur world, if you create a film without a strategy to market it, no one may ever see it, and all your efforts – not to mention costs – will go unrewareded.

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Make Diversity a Priority In the Hiring Process

Historically, people of color have been underrepresented in television and film. The *Washington Post* recently highlighted 100 cases in which persons of color were miscast, underscoring decades worth of reinforced racial stereotypes.

“If we want to change our culture, we have to change the stories we share,” says Kirthi Nath, documentary filmmaker at Cinemagical Media. “And who tells these stories matters. We need people of color both in front of and behind the camera. People all over the world are feeling the pain and harm of white supremacy, toxic patriarchy and systemic oppression. We need to address this both at the roots and on the surface. As people of color our, lived perspectives and positionality grounds us with a lens to share authentic stories that disrupt

the white gaze. Telling these decolonized stories will be part of the medicine for collective healing,”

In recent years, we have finally begun to see a shift, one that’s proven to be universally embraced among audiences. But it’s no secret that companies in all industries have historically underserves persons of color in the workforce, both in terms of leadership and compensation.

However, a shift has started taking place in recent years with diversity hiring. According to research by SocialTalent, most studies surrounding diversity in the workplace have found that for every 1 percent increase in gender diversity, company revenue increases by 3 percent, and higher levels of ethnic diversity increase revenue by a whopping 15 percent.

Entrepreneurs can create a more inclusive environment by following a model similar to Accenture with diversity training that is broken down into three categories. As their mandate states, that includes: “1. Diversity awareness, to help people understand the benefits of working with a diverse organisation; 2. Diversity management, to equip executives to manage diverse teams; and 3. Professional development, to enable women, LGBT and ethnically diverse employees to build skills for success.”

Film production clearly involves many more elements than what is seen in the final cut, and that’s because project management is broken into phases. It all starts with writing the screenplay and pitching, followed by casting. During pre-production, there are myriad logistical and budgetary concerns to factor in. Everything comes together in the end during post-production, where editing takes place and sounds, music and visual effects are added in.

In entrepreneurship, project management should also be broken into a series of phases. “Whether it’s a product launch, marketing campaign or even a pivot, some elements of project

management are simply evergreen and universal," says Elisha Kalfa, founder of Focus Global, an early stage healthcare investor. "Once the need for a project arises, a team of experts are assembled. They go onto planning, which is followed by execution. The latter has its own set of sub-phases, including A/B testing, which is closely monitored and controlled before final completion."

Explore Remote Options When Possible

There are plenty of positions in the filmmaking industry that can (and oftentimes are) being done remotely. Many of these revolve heavily around writing, but computer-heavy roles such as reviewing footage and editing also lend themselves to virtual contributions. And with some one-off tasks, freelancers or agencies are often contacted to quickly meet needs.

"We were already working remotely on many aspects of *Conviction*," adds documentarian Wertz. "But once the pandemic hit, our entire team was remote and the process was nearly seamless. With all the technological advancements and options available to us, we've been able to have an editor work from Nigeria, an animator in India and team members across the United States, it's really remarkable."

Netflix's uber popular *Tiger King* had a team of seven editors working on it that utilized Google documents and Slack conversations when mapping the story and figuring out the flow of the numerous interview subjects and twists that the film entails.

Entrepreneurs can also follow suit. As much of the economy shut down, many of the largest tech giants required their employees to work from home, and in many cases, they have continued to do so as offices have reopened. This arrangement

cuts costs for employers, and allows them to hire talents from a much wider pool. It is one of the elements of the new normal, which is promising. Similar to the film industry, remote options can prove to be more convenient for positions that are heavy with writing or computer work.

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You don’t have to go through the Hollywood-studio system to absorb the fundamentals of running a small business, but it turns out a peek behind the curtain could serve as a reminder of what makes any successful company tick.

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