



COMMUNITY SCREENINGS

In the social media era, the live event has become something rare and exotic. So much of our media consumption happens through our phones and laptops and televisions. Many times we're alone, just us and a glowing screen. But at heart, we're social creatures and live events offer something valuable that online platforms can't—a sense of community. That's why you'll find that live events are a highly effective way to engage your audience and create a human connection with your film. In this lesson, I'm going to show you how to launch a community screening campaign for your film.



LAUNCH A COMMUNITY SCREENING CAMPAIGN

First, let's get the basics down—a community screening is a live event where a partner organization arranges, promotes, and screens your film. You provide them with the materials and they do the hard work of setting everything up. Community screenings are essential to growing your audience beyond what you have the capacity to do yourself. I'll walk you through the four steps for organizing a successful campaign.

1. CREATE A SCREENING KIT

First, you need to create a screening kit that contains everything your host will need to organize an event. At a minimum, the screening kit should include a DVD, discussion guide, and promotional materials like posters and postcards. It should also include clear and simple instructions for how your hosts can best organize their screening. The more autonomy you can encourage, the better. All of your time should be focused on driving awareness and demand for your campaign, not troubleshooting logistics.

2. REACH OUT TO PARTNERS

Second, you need to promote your community screening campaign to individuals, institutions, and media in your niche. By focusing your efforts on your core audience, you'll be able to target those fans who are willing to go the extra mile and host a screening of your film. Encourage your partners to spread the word on their newsletter, blog, and social media channels. You can also pitch your campaign at conferences and speaking events. The goal is to get as many partners on board as possible.

3. LAUNCH THE CAMPAIGN

Third, it's time to activate your partnerships and launch your campaign. The goal of your launch is to create a sense of urgency and excitement around your film. Community screening campaigns are all about momentum, so try to make a big splash and line up as many screenings as possible for a specific kick-off day. One strategy is to plan your launch around a relevant holiday or celebration—for example, Veterans' Day if your film is about the military. The better job you do with an attention-grabbing launch, the easier it will be for you to continue your momentum.

4. RECRUIT EVANGELISTS

Finally, as you'll discover, a successful community screening campaign is a powerful way to turn your fans into evangelists who will tell their friends, family, and colleagues about your film. They'll help promote the campaign and build your audience organically. You'll be able to deepen your connection to your niche and, if you're lucky, spread your message to the broader public.

CASE STUDY: AGE OF CHAMPIONS

For our film *Age of Champions*, we launched more than 3,000 community screenings. Here's how we did it. First, we created a great screening kit that included a DVD, discussion guide, posters, postcards, and giveaways. We also offered electronic copies of our key art, so screening hosts could create their own promotional materials. Second, we reached out to institutions in the

senior health world that wanted to host a screening of the film. They promoted the campaign to their followers and generated buzz around the film. One of our most effective strategies was to pitch the film at the national conference for nonprofit retirement communities, where we were able to line up more than 200 screenings. Third, we set our initial launch date for National Senior Citizen Day, to capitalize on the event and give our partners the opportunity to use the film for their own outreach. And, finally, after we launched, we continued to promote the campaign and work with a growing number of fans who became evangelists for the film. After two years, we had shown the film in all fifty states and reached more than 150,000 people. It took a lot of work to build the momentum, but our community screening campaign became the biggest engine for fans and sales.

TAKEAWAY

As an independent filmmaker, you may not have the resources to open your film at the multiplex, but you *can* provide your audience the live event experience. Community screenings are a fantastic way to deepen your relationship with your niche and create a human-to-human connection with your film. If people love your work, it's the perfect opportunity for them to share it with the people around them.