

Achieving proper U.S. distribution key to Canadian films

MONTREAL (CP) — Canadian film producers can't depend on independent distributors to bring them U.S. box office success, says Bruce Mallen, a Montreal marketing consultant with close links to Hollywood and now a film producer himself.

"The ability of the Canadian industry to develop distribution in the U.S. market is the key to its commercial viability," Mallen said in an interview Tuesday.

"The past record of the Canadian film industry hasn't been very good when it comes to U.S. marketing.

"Many Canadian-produced films haven't receive any U.S. distribution. Of those that have, many weren't able to get good distribution arrangements. Many that did get good arrangements didn't have them adhered to."

Mallen, former management dean now on leave of absence from Montreal's Concordia University to complete research for a book on film distribution, denies vehemently that Hollywood discriminates against Canadians or Canadian-produced films.

He says American films produced independently of the big Hollywood studios also have trouble getting distribution from the six "majors," who operate the big studios and control more than 85 per cent of film revenues in the key U.S. market.

The majors — United Artists, Universal, Columbia, 20th Century-Fox, Paramount and Warner — distributed only about two dozen independently produced films last year from U.S. and foreign sources combined.

So-called mini-majors and independent distributors just don't have the same power to get films onto U.S. screen.

Industry key

"Distribution is the key to this industry," said Mallen, 41, who commutes monthly between Montreal and Los Angeles, where he is helping the University of Southern California set up a research centre on the entertainment business and meeting the moguls who run Hollywood.

"Distributors do have to take a big risk, sometimes bigger than the producers. You look at *Meatballs*, the only Canadian film that's being distributed now by the majors. There are 850 prints of *Meatballs* in circulation, and only a major can do that."

"It requires a minimum of \$2.5 million in ads. The cost of promotion and of prints is often greater than the actual cost of production."

Mallen said the majors are like grocers: they have shelf space available but they like to use it to promote what sells best. But he sees encouraging signs

for Canadian producers, despite the brick wall they often complain they find themselves up against in Hollywood.

The proportion of independently produced films distributed by the majors is rising, and with film production stimulated in Canada by generous tax concessions, Canada is on its way to becoming the biggest source of independently produced, English-language films.

"We may produce more than \$100 million in films this year, and U.S. independent production is dropping," Mallen said. "It fell to \$100 million last year from \$125 million the year before."

Mallen's own film, called *The First Hello*, is expected to cost \$2.65 million. A prospectus has been filed with the Ontario Securities Commission and filming is set to start Sept. 5 near Banff, Alta. The film deals with an escaped convict who falls in love with a mentally handicapped woman.

Working for him are a line producer to look after

the theatrical end of things and an executive producer "who is familiar with the Hollywood scene and can get the majors interested."

Initial funds

Initial financing is provided by the Canadian Film Development Corp. and by Filmcorp Entertainment Finances Inc., a

Montreal-based company set up by Mallen to provide venture capital for film production. Shareholders include European and Middle Eastern investors.

"Ordinary Canadian venture capital firms aren't very venturesome, especially when it comes to film," he said.

There are three stages

to film financing: venture capital to get things started, interim financing to provide short-term capital for production of the film, and long-term financing, where the big tax breaks come.

Mallen says recent tax changes making money invested in Canadian films deductible from taxable income have helped deve-

lop "a whole new generation of entrepreneurial producers who are businessmen."

He expressed hope that film schools in Canada would show more interest

in the business end of things, and at his urging, Concordia University is considering a joint program between the management and fine arts faculties.

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BOX OFFICE BOMBER

Pageant winner turns actress

By **TERRY GRIMWOOD**

Miss Burlington 1977 is causing line-ups in Toronto.

The line-ups are forming to see Cindy Girling and her co-stars in Paramount Pictures' new movie *Meatballs*.

"It's the type of film everyone can relate to," said the 22-year-old actress.

In the recently released film *Miss Girling* plays a councillor in training named Wendy who, she says, is constantly teased about being the "blond bombshell" of the camp.

The main plot of the comedy, made in Haliburton, Ont. last August and September, surrounds an Olympiad between two summer camps and the pranks they pull on each other, said Miss Girling.

Bill Murray from Saturday Night Live plays an individual known as Tripper in the Canadian film.

"The man's a comic genius," Miss Girling said after working with Murray during the two-month shooting period.

Meatballs is her second film released in three years of acting.

Miss Girling also had a role in the film *I Miss You Hugs and Kisses*, in



Miss Burlington 1977 seen here crowning her successor.

19 JUL 1979

clipinc.

TORONTO STAR
(quot.)
Toronto, Ont.

SPOTLIGHTS

6209
**Meatballs
a \$6 million
gravy-train**

Bowden's
PRESS CLIPPING

VANCOUVER B.C.
THE PROVINCE
D. — Circ. 125-126,000