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Ideas + Execution

Short but sweet

A trailer can bring in the bucks, even without a film to sell

by Brendan Christie
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Filmmakers can sometimes find themselves sitting on a pile of great footage but still be scratching their heads over finishing funds. No problem - just make a trailer and sell from that.

Case in point: NY prodcos Shine Global's Emmy-winning co-directors Sean Fine and Andrea Nix had shot 60 hours of footage for a film that would become *War Dance*, a doc that follows children from Uganda's Patongo Internally Displaced Persons Camp when their school qualifies for the national arts competition. Faced with the task of finding a distrib, Shine producer Albie Hecht and executive director/EP Susan Maclaury Hecht turned to Mighty Pictures and tasked them with cutting a trailer for a film that didn't exist in order to help drum up the requisite interest.

Mighty, a NY-based outfit specializing in docs, trailers and promos, started with a five-hour select reel provided by Shine (without a plot or storyline) and a translation, as none of the footage was in English. "In this case, there was no film. There was just a lot of footage, and no one had decided whose story it was and whose point of view you told it from," explains Mighty president/CD Charlie Sadoff. "So there were all these questions that would have otherwise been answered by the process of cutting film that we had to try to answer in creating the trailer." Targeting was also a problem. Normally, trailers woo viewers. In this case, it had to demonstrate storyline and show, as Sadoff notes "that the material existed to create an actual film.

"You want to cut something that shows the breadth of the characters and the situations and the production, but you don't want to get into the situation where you are basically cutting a mini-version of the film."

It was decided that what was most compelling were the stories of the children, through which viewers would gain an understanding

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of the school and the country's turbulent history. While the initial cut of the trailer used cards to get past the language problem, a voiceover/subtitle combination was eventually used in the 10-minute HD trailer, which was cut by Mighty editor Josh Glaser.

Despite crafting so many annually, Sadoff says there are no guidelines for what goes into a solid trailer - save for viewer expectations. "There are no rules, [though] a lot of them end up looking the same," he observes. "Most trailers you see start with some sort of tease about the story and they end with a fast montage. That's sort of the 'generic trailer.' I think people are somewhat conditioned to see that, and when they don't see that they feel like something is wrong."

The reaction to *Dance's* trailer was proof positive that a good trailer can help sell a film: THINKfilm signed *War Dance* for distribution, and the trailer was nominated for Outstanding Trailer-Fundraiser at the Golden Trailer Awards.

Next up for Mighty are promos for Spike TV, a trailer for the Global Film Initiative's *Global Lens 2007*, and a feature doc called *Dream Rider* about a father and son on a cross-country bike trip.

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