

The Bottom Line on Making Films

At the April 25th, 1996 IMAGE meeting, the featured speakers were the father and son team, Patrick Donahue and Sean Donahue, from Bottom Line Studios. They focus on low budget (\$150K), action films shot on 16mm, that are released on TV and video in foreign markets. Why low budget films? "It's much easier to raise \$50K to \$75K, than trying to raise \$1M to \$1.5M!" How do they survive on such small budgets? "We own a CNC machine shop, that we started ten years ago. We don't have to eat off the movies as a result."

How did they get started in the business? Pat related, "Well, no one would hire me to do stunts, so I started doing commercials for the Cookbook restaurant, where I had the freedom to do virtually anything, including car chases!" Why do they write their own scripts? "We see a lot of scripts, but they simply aren't the types of films we want to do. I guess the bottom line is that we like our own ideas!"

Typically Bottom Line shoots in 24 to 28 days, using only 25,000 feet of film to get coverage. (They've done some wild and crazy things to minimize their film costs, including sorting old film by the blue, green, or red filters necessary to expose it correctly!) They currently prefer using Photochem in Los Angeles for their developing. They shoot on 16mm because buyers are unwilling to buy a feature shot on video. For that matter, 35mm is the medium that buyers really prefer.

Bottom Line went overseas, not by choice, but because that was where they wound up. There are 48 foreign territories, to which they sell exclusive rights to a territory for seven years for \$20K to \$50K. What is the upside on a film? "A film made for \$150 to \$200 thousand can obtain between \$390 thousand to \$1.4 million."

Pat related that it was a painful process finding a distributor, and that they felt fortunate in having formed a relationship with Artist View. They are charged 20% of gross plus a cap on expenses, unlike other distributors who want 25 to 35 percent, with no cap on expenses.

Where are their films shown? "For us, TV is our market, it is very safe, and it's where the money is. As a result, we're trying to be less violent in our films. In nine out of ten countries, they want less blood. We have to edit out the really gross scenes. Now of course, there are countries where they love that scene of the knife through the jaw, through the mouth, and out through the head."

Almost needless to say, it was evident to the audience that both Patrick and Sean greatly enjoy their work, which results in a new film every 8 to 12 months.