7
Strategic Distribution: Reaching Key Audiences in Innovative Ways

Thomas Harding

INTRODUCTION—MY STORY

In order for your advocacy video to truly make an impact, you will need to ensure that it reaches key viewers with the power to act. This chapter will explain how to choose your distribution method, design your campaign, and ensure your video creates the maximum possible impact.

In the early 1990s I worked as a producer/director on a variety of broadcast television projects. Many of my news features and documentaries were aired around the world on national television networks. However, I was concerned that though these films had a large audience, their impact was minimal. The messages of the films were diluted by the context they were placed in, between advertisements for cars and the latest popular game show.

I left broadcast television and co-founded Undercurrents, along with other video-makers dedicated to using video to bring about change. In the old days as a television director I would ask myself "what film shall I make which will get me airtime on national television?" Instead, I now asked myself "what method of distribution should we use to bring about the most impact in this particular campaign or project?" The difference had profound consequences.

One of my first projects was to assist a community that lived in Wrexham, Wales (see Figure 7.1). Its members were suffering from appalling noise and pollution from the neighboring aluminium factory. For many years they had asked the manager of the factory to do something about the problem, but they received no response.

Here is the distribution strategy that evolved, broken down in stages:

Step 1: Define audience and agree upon distribution strategy

To my great surprise they told me they didn't need a video made about their issues to be distributed by national television. Instead, they told

Figure 7.1 A community activist in Wales uses video to document pollution (Thomas Harding)

me they needed local media attention to build support for the issue in the community. This was a great adjustment for me as a professional producer-director. After all, I was working with a community to bring about change, not making broadcast documentaries any more.

I interviewed various residents, and we submitted these interviews along with recordings of the appallingly loud sound levels to the local radio and newspapers. These were then played on the local television and radio station news.

Step 2: Make adjustments

The residents then asked us to make a video to show to the local manager. But it soon became clear that the manager had no role in resolving the problem. He was never to be seen in the factory and whenever contact was made, he was rude and uncooperative. It was time to rethink our distribution plan.

Step 3: Rethink and build distribution strategy

A few months later the residents told me they were ready to take distribution to the next level. Again I offered to make a great documentary to be broadcast on national television. Again, they told me "no." Why? Because they had done research and had

learnt that the owners of the factory actually lived in New York, and would not be watching television in the UK, nor be pressured by UK viewers. We agreed instead to produce a "video letter" that would be made specifically for the owners of the factory. I recorded a series of interviews with the residents, and included footage of the black smoke coming from the factory and a wonderful sequence with one of the elderly ladies wearing ear-muffs while recording the high sound levels on a meter.

Step 4: Maximize the impact

We soon realized that the video letter had become a great story in its own right. Now was the time to get national television exposure. We contacted the BBC and invited their producers to make a film about the video letter. They loved the idea and followed as three of the residents flew from the UK to present the video letter to the owners in New York. The BBC was not only pleased with the story, it was also happy to be able to use large sections of the videotape for its own documentary.

Step 5: Evaluate distribution strategy

As a result of this video distribution strategy, many local community members got involved (owing to local media coverage). The owners dismissed the manager of the factory and reduced sound and smoke pollution because of the video letter that was delivered to them, and the success story was shown on national television, raising the credibility of the local campaign and inspiring others to do the same.

Lessons learned

I learnt many important lessons from this project. Perhaps the most significant was that things don't always go according to plan. And if this happens, take some time to rethink the distribution plan and develop a new strategy. Another is that when a surprising opportunity turns up (like the BBC documentary), grab it with both hands if it will help your overall objectives. Finally, the most important lesson was that there are many different distribution methods available, and knowing what is possible is a critical part of the process.

DISTRIBUTION METHODS

Distribution is important because without it your project becomes a dead-end program. People will say, "I spent two months making video and nothing happened." Distribution gives you feedback on your work and furthers your

> work. It gives you the impulse to regenerate the process. It is like a fertilizer. (Amalia Cordova, Latin American Program Coordinator, Film and Video Center of the National Museum of the American Indian, USA)

Having read the other chapters, you now know how to design your advocacy strategy. You also know how to produce and edit a video. Now you have to find a way of getting it to the audiences you want to reach.

Remember, you need to create a distribution strategy *before* starting the production and editing process to ensure that the video reaches intended audiences in a timely and effective way.

There are a wide variety of distribution methods available to the video advocate (see Table 7.1 below). In practice, most video campaigns make use of more than one distribution strategy—"multi-purposing." Equally, successful campaigns often target different audiences via separate distribution strategies in a well-thought-out sequence at different times—"sequencing" (see pp. 273–5 for more on these two techniques). Timing and sequencing can be critical in making the difference between success and failure.

Table 7.1 Distribution strategies

1. Public screenings	Community screenings Video vans and mobile screenings Home-based screenings and microcinemas Film festivals Theatrical distribution (movies)
2. Tape/disc duplication and distribution	Self-distribution Via networks Distributor Retail outlets
3. Private screenings	Direct-to-decision-maker Legal process
4. Broadcast media (including cable, satellite and free-to-air television)	Television news Television documentary Radio news and documentaries
5. Internet and wireless	Live streaming Websites Newsletters/campaign alerts Flash animations Video messages via cellphone

In this chapter I identify five basic ways of distributing video. Each requires different technology, different budgets and different amounts of energy. As you may be an organization or an individual with limited resources, think through what is an appropriate choice for you. Remember, it's not necessarily the size of the audience you reach, but being tactical about reaching the audience that will make a difference. With the distribution tactics outlined in this chapter you'll be able to reach, or in some cases, create, the audience that matters, and get around the traditional gate-keepers who prevent audiences from seeing your material.

Make your distribution budget

As you go about designing your distribution strategy, and before you start out on implementation, draw up a distribution budget to find out if you can afford it and if you require further funds. Of course, your aim is to minimize your expenses and maximize your impact.

Key questions to answer before you get to the budget:

- How long will your distribution campaign be?
- How many copies do you want to distribute? How many community screenings will there be?
- How will they be distributed and to whom (i.e. local, national, international, via mail or hand)?
- Can you spread your spending across time to allow fundraising to take place?
- How can you reduce your costs?
- Who can help you raise the funds required?

Try to think creatively about how to raise funds as part of your distribution strategy. Don't forget that volunteer time and donations of equipment or venues ("in-kind" donations) count as fundraising so talk to local businesses and individuals who can lend support.

If you can, try to raise money as well. One of your target audiences in your distribution strategy planning process should include potential donors. These can be people on the street who donate a few coins, people who actually buy the tapes and organizations who give grants for important video work (either at the preproduction stage or in order to support outreach). Also, remember that if you are seeking funding for video projects, include outreach funding in this request not only production costs.

You should work with colleagues or advisers to create a budget for your distribution strategy. The sample budget narrative in Appendix VII can guide your thinking, and could also be included in a proposal to a potential funder. It is oriented towards a strategy that primarily includes community and direct-to-decision-maker screenings, as well as distribution of copies of the video. A more detailed resource kit on outreach budgeting is available at <www.mediarights.org>.

PUBLIC VIDEO SCREENINGS

> I think it's important to understand the importance of a group experience. Video is an emotionally rich medium, and when people share an experience together, they bond. Also, when you work through organizations, you are building on that organization's strength. People who watch a video with other members of an organization can take action right then and there. (Pat Aufderheide, Director, Center for Social Media at American University, Washington, DC)

A first distribution category is "public screenings." This refers to community screenings, home screenings, video vans and mobile screenings as well as theatrical distribution and film festivals.

Community screenings

A community screening is an event where you show your video in a local setting—such as a school, a town hall, or a store—in front of a group of people. These people might be from the community where you have filmed, or from a community that you are trying to mobilize around the issue. Community screenings can be used to engage people in a specific action, but also as a means to instigate discussion and encourage participatory decision-making.

Multi-community campaigns are particularly useful when you are addressing national issues. One way of reducing the administrative load of this method is to use an existing national network, which will enable you to plug into an already established group of local leaders. This can save considerable time. Of course, for this to work, your issue and your approach must match that of your partner organization. Often, if the organization has been involved from an early stage in the production they will be more vested in it, and more willing to participate in distribution and to shoulder costs themselves.

In some cases you need to bypass local leadership in order to reach a group that is affected by an issue. This is particularly the

case with sensitive issues related to women, the gay community, and others affected by taboo policies or practices that local leaders may be reluctant to discuss (such as HIV/AIDS, refugee rights, indigenous land claims, etc.).

Advantages of community screenings include:

- You can make a significant impact on a small budget. You may simply need to find a good venue, invite members of the local population and show them your video.
- A community screening can become a springboard for discussion about a policy or practice that affects the community directly, or for discussion about a sensitive topic that is going to require close attention post-screening, especially if this topic involves trauma or loss.
- If the video is going to present issues affecting the community to a wider audience, the screening provides an opportunity to get the community's feedback first.
- Targeted groups of individuals can be engaged in specific actions in support of a campaign (e.g. student activists on sweatshops).

A community screening can be a one-off occasion, so you don't have to build a massive organization to support the effort. You can even integrate a screening within existing social events. For example, you can show a video at a festival, carnival, or other community activity. This way, you don't have to worry about attracting an audience. You can build on someone else's marketing efforts. If you do this, consider when to schedule the screening. Pick a date that does not conflict with larger social events, such as religious holidays. Coordinate with other organizers to ensure that the timing is strategic.

The steps to organizing your screening include:

- Identify your audience and select the best film or video that suits their needs
- Identify the person or organization who will present the film and facilitate a discussion
- Find the venue and organize the equipment
- Market the screening
- Manage people
- Coordinate an engaging post-screening discussion
- Evaluate

The key to a successful community screening is that the audience will engage with the video—and you can transfer their passion into action.

Case study: STEPS in the community
by Don Edkins, Executive Producer, STEPS, South Africa

The STEPS program in South Africa is an innovative project to create a collection of films about HIV/AIDS for use throughout Southern Africa. The project involves local filmmakers and NGOs throughout the region in the creation of programming.

Our project began when our mobile cinema was travelling in the mountains of Lesotho. At that time, we were showing films about environmental issues, social issues, and political issues. People started asking us for films to learn about HIV/AIDS. There were some films from Uganda, but there were no films in the local language. Then we found in the Western Cape there was the same demand. We had no films to offer them.

So we decided to develop a collection of films—to talk to different audiences. There is so much stigma, so much discrimination around HIV/AIDS, that people don't want to say aloud that they are infected. We knew we would have to work with the characters, the subjects of documentaries, closely, because when they came out and spoke aloud, their neighbors would be prejudiced.

We began the whole project by involving HIV groups in the story lines. We consulted with them, and filmmakers would brainstorm in groups. We have HIV/AIDS experts on the project to evaluate the process all along the way, make sure we are using the right language … that we are going in the right direction. During filming, we also have counseling on hand for the subjects. And the subjects are involved in the screenings.

Each film in our collection stands on its own. This is not a series. Each story has its particular way of telling itself, without making people uncomfortable. When we show the films, we have facilitators there to provide information not contained in the film. For this, we have developed a facilitators' guide to deal with questions relating to the particular film they've just seen—nutrition, gender, or whatever the issue might be.

We conduct workshops with the subjects, so that among themselves they can discuss their expectations, their reactions, both positive and

negative. Subjects are part of the whole project, and support each other. They are now going around with the mobile cinemas. We are just completing a film about this entire process. We are also planning a conference next year, to bring all the different screening groups together. … Our films resonate with the people. They love them because the films are about them.

Identify your audience

As explained in Chapter 1, you will need to identify your audience before you devise your distribution strategy. Once you have done this you will be able to answer the following questions:

- Who do you want to attend the screening (community leaders, people shown in the film, government officials, local residents, human rights advocates, etc.)?
- Do you want to get the most people possible to the screening or are there particular people you want to attract?
- What language(s) does the audience speak? Do you need a sign language expert?
- How long an event will the audience be interested in participating in (e.g. what will their attention span be at the screening)? Do you want to show the whole video or just clips? A trailer?
- Will a video be enough to attract an audience or do you need to organize a social event as well?

Choose the right facilitator

The person who will introduce, contextualize, and facilitate the discussion of the video is critical. A good facilitator will relate to and communicate with their audience, and hold their respect. You will need to brief the facilitator extensively on the film, and watch it with them beforehand. Explain why it was made, and what the advocacy objective was, and discuss how they will open and provide context for the film, facilitate a discussion around questions and issues raised, and move the audience to action after the screening.

Select the venue and the host organization

The wrong venue—too small, too bright, too noisy, too far away—or the wrong host organization—unpopular in the community, representative of a particular faction—could have a negative impact on your efforts. Think creatively about venues—open spaces in

community, football fields and basketball courts, churches and other places of worship are all potential screening locations.

Here are some questions to help you locate your venue:

- Is the proposed space one that will be comfortable for your audience? Be sensitive to physical access and security at the venue as well as racial, gender, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and class tensions that may affect an audience's willingness to attend, or to participate fully. Is your choice of venue linked to your facilitator or an ally on the project? Does this mean it's the best choice for a venue or should you look elsewhere?
- Is there enough room for the audience you hope to attract?
- Is there electricity in place? If not, how will you supply it?
- What equipment do they have? What equipment will you need to bring? Is there enough space for a screen if you want to use a projector? Who will set up the equipment and knows how to use it?
- Can everyone see the screen you will use? Can everyone hear with the available sound system? Can you darken the room for daytime screenings?
- If you plan to issue tickets, is there a good place to collect them? How will people pay and do you need to provide a share to the venue?
- Who is in charge of the venue? Can you gain access to the venue two hours before the event to set up? Who will lock the place after you have left?
- Can you provide food and drink at the venue? What will you do with the rubbish?
- What will you do if it rains? Is the venue a dry location? Is there an alternative in case of bad weather?

Organize people and market your event

You will need people to help you organize and market the event. As we discuss in "Networking" below, the more you are linked and allied with other organizations from early stages in the production process, the easier this will be. The following questions will help to assess what support you need:

- Who has direct links to the issues whom you can invite to speak at the event (e.g. people shown in film, campaign leaders, etc.)?

- Who can lend a hand to publicize your event? Who will produce publicity materials and who will distribute them in the community? Who is going to contact local media to cover the event?
- What publicity materials will you need to produce? These may include posters, flyers, brochures, newsletters, information for stories in local media, stickers, and T-shirts. Remember that publicity materials need to be sensitive to local concerns regarding language, modesty, phrasing etc., and may need to vary by audience. Also, many screenings are organized by email, signs or word-of-mouth alone.
- Who is going to organize drinks, food, and other resources?
- Who is going to raise money at the event (sell tickets, collect donations, ask for grants from organizations, etc.)?
- Who is going to manage the equipment during the screening? Do they need training?

Turn viewing into action

In our experience having screenings, we have found that it is best to contextualize the film. We give a brief introduction of our goals and mission, an overview of the presentation, and a short check-in question to get people centred and grounded. Mike Molina, formerly of Books Not Bars, a campaign around juvenile jails in the USA, says:

> The aim of the screening is to turn a viewing experience into action—to transfer the energy and passion that a video provokes into concrete results. How do you do this?
>
> There are a number of ways to mobilize your audience after a screening. Here are a few suggestions:
>
> - Have a facilitator appropriate for the film and the audience.
> - Open by providing context for the film.
> - Facilitate a discussion after the film around the questions and issues raised to help get people informed, and to spark more proactive, invested community involvement.
> - Get the names and addresses of the audience for future networking.
> - Recruit audience members to become active in your campaign.
> - Ask the audience to donate funds.
> - Encourage the audience to take immediate action. For example, you can ask the audience to write a letter to the government or join a march on the town hall.

- Ask the audience to participate in an upcoming action.
- Distribute a sheet with ideas on how to take action, and a list of organizations on the issue.

Making screenings enjoyable

> Viewing can be fun if you are able to connect the issues contained in the film to the lives of your viewers. (Joey Lozano)

Some videos, particularly about human rights, are extremely serious and at times deeply distressing. However, if people feel the connection to their lives, and the opportunity to interact and discuss the issues raised, they are likely to respond to them, even enjoy them. There is also nothing necessarily wrong with introducing additional fun elements to a screening, even if at the core of the event is a focus on a painful topic.

There are many ways to make a community event appealing. Dance, music, food, comedy, poetry, artwork, games, and sport—these are a small sample of what you could provide. The trick is to know your audience. What would they appreciate that would still be appropriate for the subject matter at hand?

Another way to make video screenings fun is to integrate them into street theatre. Show the video as part of the event. Bring a clown or an actor to engage the audience. Film the audience and play back both the video and the "live" footage to keep their attention.

Case study: Structuring screenings with *Operation Fine Girl: Rape Used as a Weapon of War in Sierra Leone*

Lilibet Foster talks about how she and Binta Mansaray planned the screenings strategy for *Operation Fine Girl*.

> With *Operation Fine Girl* we first held a public screening of the film in a town with a broad-based community of people in every age group, ex-child soldiers from each of the opposing factions, and abducted women and girls, to help guide us in setting up screenings across the country. The film was introduced to the village by their tribal chief, and everyone was encouraged to ask questions or give their reaction to the film afterwards, in front of the group. From this, we concluded that a group screening should be followed by separate screenings for different parts of the community. For instance, holding a separate screening for young girls, and a separate screening for child-soldiers without their elders in the room, would generate better discussion amongst them, etc.

Evaluate

Evaluation is critical if you plan to hold future events and want to maximize the impact of your screenings. Ask, why did people attend? How did people react to the video? Will they become involved in the issue at hand? What did your colleagues think? Was the effort it took to organize the event worth the results? Did you succeed in your goals? How could you do better next time?

One method of evaluation is the traditional survey. You can ask people a short list of questions as they leave an event. This might be something as simple as "How would you rate the event: great, fair, poor?" or more complex questions, like: "Has this event changed your opinion/view on X? Much, little, negative, not at all." Be conscious of people's desire for privacy if the screening was about a sensitive topic. Consider how you plan to evaluate the event in the longer run as some people may take a few days, weeks or months to appreciate how the video affected their thinking about an issue. Remember also that change can take many forms—from a clear change in policy, to increased sensitization around an issue, to organizing initiatives among your audience.

If you've set clear goals for your advocacy you'll find it easier to evaluate at every stage.

Case study: Top ten tips for organizing a community screening

Joey Lozano, a human rights activist, videographer and trainer working in Mindanao, the Philippines, offers the following advice:

1. Visit village officials and community leaders days before the screening to explain the upcoming event and determine what requirements you have to comply with
2. Know who your local contacts are. Are they on good terms with those within the traditional political structure? If they are, expect a successful screening. If not, ensure that if you still decide to go ahead with the screening, the event won't be harassed or interrupted
3. Set clear objectives that you want to achieve with the screening, these being your bases in measuring success or failure
4. Ensure that local resources meet your technical requirements (e.g. availability of power supply; enough space to accommodate expected number of participants, etc.)
5. Ensure good attendance by posting announcements or broadcasting them through popular local radio stations in the area

6. Engage the interest of your audience by relating the film to something very relevant to them (e.g. you may want to stress that the film can help them determine the best way to maintain their source of livelihood)
7. Bring other films that could help attract the highest attendance (e.g. you may bring a copy of a popular commercial film, the theme of which falls along the lines of the documentary you want to show them)
8. If necessary, organize an entertainment or talent show that would feature or engage local residents
9. Before starting, give due acknowledgement to local officials, leaders, and others who helped the screening to happen
10. Devise a feedback mechanism that would help you determine the success or failure of the screening

---

Mobile public screenings

> Doing in-person presentations is the most effective way to make a long-term impact. The audience meets you, they hear your story and are able to connect the videos to something concrete. The videos then take on a certain intimacy and connectedness for the audience. And many times someone who has attended a screening will buy a tape and show it to someone else who will want to buy copies as well, and so on. (Alexandra Halkin, Chiapas Media Project/Promedios, an innovative indigenous media initiative)

In an ordinary public screening, the audience comes to you to see the video in a fixed location. In a mobile public screening, you take the video from location to location. You can then screen it before many small, targeted audiences, including those who might otherwise have no access to videos at all. You can reach audiences nationwide in the time and place of your choosing.

How to organize a mobile public screening: Video vans

Video vans are simply vehicles (cars, vans) that house the video-related equipment. Typically, they include video players (VHS, VCD, or DVD), sound equipment (amplifier and speakers) and television monitors. Some video vans have projection equipment instead of a television. When going to remote areas, video vans may also include a generator to provide electricity for the audiovideo equipment.

With a video van you can be flexible on timing and location, and build swiftly on momentum. A video van can reach many small audiences in quick succession over a short amount of time. It is, therefore, a great tool for short-term mass mobilization. Within two weeks, for example, you could travel to over twenty communities, providing two screenings a day. With a target audience of 30 people per screening, that's almost 1,200 different people! The key word here is "different." It is fairly easy to build up a small following that will attend a regular video event. It is far more difficult to find different people to come to video screenings. A similar audience might take over a year to target if you focused on one community.

Case study: Video vans around the world

Brazil: Brazil has a long tradition of using video in popular education. One group that has used video vans is the Workers Television Network (Televisao dos Trabalhadores, or TVT). They created a "TV Truck" initiative in which a truck with projection screens on each side would park outside car-manufacturing plants outside Sao Paolo in the early morning as workers were coming to work. Each week they would produce a show called La Jornal on political and social issues in Brazil. Organizers estimated that they reached 3,000–4,000 workers a week, and that greater discussion was generated by the group setting in which the video was viewed.

Kenya: Kakuma Refugee Camp is based in northern Kenya. It houses over 85,000 people, mostly refugees from Somalia and Sudan. FilmAid International has worked with the local community leaders to organize a video-screening program. FilmAid has equipped a truck with a giant screen on the side. Three times a week, the truck tours eleven locations around the camp. The program starts with cartoons for the children, then an educational video, and then a main feature (either a movie or a documentary). The program is changed every month. Typically, 8,000 to 10,000 people watch each evening, and by the time it has rotated the 11 locations, approximately 100,000 have watched each program.

Working with local nongovernmental organizations and the community is the key to success. FilmAid has found that it is important to create a sense of ownership of the program in the community. FilmAid trains refugees and locals and they run the programs themselves. In addition, they have built a "follow-up"

schedule, with post-screening discussions during the daytime by members of the local community.

Microcinemas and house parties

Another option related to community screenings is to hold coordinated screenings simultaneously—each in someone's home. The pioneer in this in the USA has been the organization MoveOn, <www.moveon.org>. MoveOn has successfully promoted a series of video screenings across the country by asking its members and supporters to become hosts. For example, around the opening of the political film *Fahrenheit 9/11* MoveOn coordinated over 650 house parties to discuss the film. Hosts with high-speed Internet access could access a live webchat with the filmmaker, Michael Moore, and all attendees learned how to take action on the issues raised in the film. Although MoveOn used a web-based software to help hosts plan parties, and enable people to locate the nearest screening party, it is also possible to organize this via email or even with a circulating paper list of the planned parties. The parties have a host who agrees to coordinate the technical side of the screening, the MoveOn organizers provide a screening guide and in some cases a DVD, and other people attending bring snacks and food, and help clean up.

A variant on this is to try to organize local video parlors or viewing rooms to screen the video, and to reach a wider population. Human Rights Alert did this successfully in the north-eastern Indian state of Manipur, showing their video about human rights abuses committed by the Indian security forces in local video parlors (small, community-based venues showing films), rather than in private homes.

Screenings at film festivals

> Often the press will attend film and video festivals looking for a good story. Some of our best press was through contacts made via film and video festivals. (Alexandra Halkin, Chiapas Media Project/Promedios)

A traditional way to get your videos seen by a wider audience is through the film festival circuit. The scale of a festival can range from fifty people watching three or four videos on a television monitor in a community centre, to a three-week event spanning seventy locations.

Sending your film to an existing festival

Before submitting your video, ask yourself: "Can this festival reach my target audience?" For example, a national film festival may expose your video to national donors, mass media, and other filmmakers, who may be able to help you. An indigenous film festival may attract audiences from within the local indigenous population as well as others working with this constituency. Also ask yourself whether realistically your film has a chance—many festivals are extremely competitive, and you should make sure your film is a strong fit.

Each film festival has different application criteria. Make sure you know their rules before sending your tape. Typical criteria include:

- Good-quality sound and video
- Thematic "fit" with the festival (human rights, labor, etc.)
- Engaging, story-driven narratives
- Type of filmmaker (i.e. "known producers," "first-time filmmakers")
- Potential for TV distributors to pick up

Make sure you don't send master copies, as programmers rarely return tapes. Some festivals require application fees. Only send your video to this type of festival if you are confident your video has a chance of being accepted.

Strengths of film festivals

- Develop a sense of community
- Create a discussion forum for video work
- Allow you to compare the work of various filmmakers and see what other material is being produced on issues you are focused on
- Give you access to a new, large audience
- Enable networking with press, general public and other filmmakers
- Provide media exposure, action, and advocacy opportunities

One way to make festival screenings an effective vehicle for change is, as with a community screening, to engage the audience in post-screening action. An example of this is the work of US filmmaker Judith Helfand and the organization, Working Films (which acts as an intermediary between filmmakers and nonprofit organizations

in the US). At the 2002 Sundance Film Festival screening of her film *Blue Vinyl*, about the dangers of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and vinyl siding, Judith encouraged the audience to write to their lawmakers and to PVC manufacturers. One particular target was the lingerie firm Victoria's Secret. Judith provided postcards for audience members to send to Victoria's Secret letting them know that they cared about the issue. Over 1,500 postcards were sent during one week of the film festival, and the owner of Victoria's Secret called the leading activist organization on this issue, Greenpeace, who had been running a campaign on this topic, to discuss the policy.

DUPLICATION—VIDEO TAPE/DISC DISTRIBUTION

One of the simplest ways of distributing a film or video is by making a copy ("duplicate") and passing it to someone to watch. This method can be particularly successful for focused campaigns such as direct-to-decision-maker distribution and legal process distribution, both of which are discussed later in this chapter.

This type of duplication distribution can be scaled up to mass distribution making use of a print catalogue, retail outlet, website, or other marketing device. It can also be done most effectively, in terms of advocacy, by using networks of allies. A sophisticated example of advanced self-distribution would be Undercurrents' bi-annual compilation that we put together and distributed to subscribers around the world during the 1990s. These tapes were 90 minutes long, made up of ten to fifteen films made by different directors and duplicated on VHS cassette with striking graphics on the box cover. This type of distribution has been copied around the world from Brazil to South Korea to Australia, and is being replicated by compilation video websites such as OneWorld TV.

Once you reach this level you might also be able to use a fulfillment house. This is a company that will "fulfill" video orders for you, sending tapes to purchasers without you having to attend to every order.

Video distribution making use of networks and alliances

> Even if you have a distributor it is extremely important that you take a proactive role in getting the work seen. Developing personal relationships with people/organizations who have key constituencies/campaigns is critical so that the network can grow. (Alex Halkin, Chiapas Media Project)

What is networking? Networking is when you make best use of your relationships—the people and organizations you know—to achieve your video advocacy objectives. Networking so that other people help with your distribution will ensure you reach more people in less time with less money being paid by yourself, *and* it will engage a wider section of the community in the project. The key to successful networking is to begin before production so that you cultivate enthusiasm and support for the project early on. By engaging your network in your video from an early stage you can increase the chances they will support it financially and organizationally once it comes to distribution.

For most social justice video, effective use of networking will be the key to distribution, and, most importantly, impact.

One trick to generating a truly large audience by this method is to combine network distribution with screenings for organization memberships, communities, and the broader public. For example, if you distribute 1,000 copies to 1,000 organizations, and each is screened to 100 people, you reach 100,000 people. This is called pyramid distribution.

One of the most successful examples of pyramid distribution is by the video advocacy group Video Sewa in India, who produced a tape, *My Work, My Self*, about the national census, which was distributed to local communities for local playback using television monitors and VHS players. SEWA reached an impressive audience of over 500,000 people through networks, coalitions, and by building on existing outreach activities.

Cash flow: Caution!

It is easy to order hundreds of duplicate copies of a film and then not be able to sell them and therefore not be able to cover your costs. This is a real problem for duplicate-distribution and should be taken seriously by anyone interested in this method of distribution.

Cash flow is a challenge for videotape or DVD distribution. Whereas in a community screening you may sell tickets or ask for donations to raise funds, in tape/DVD distribution, unless you receive a distribution grant, you must pay for bulk copies and then wait to collect income as you sell each one. This can place a big burden on a small organization with limited funds. One solution is to build up a list of purchasers, arrange pre-orders for tapes, and collect the cash *before* you make the copies. Another is to make a limited number of copies at a time, enough to cover you over a

short period. This will be more expensive in the long run because per tape/DVD costs for copying decrease as the number of copies increases, but it may save you financial headaches in the short term. Whatever path you take, before you start on the VHS or DVD distribution road, you must think through these finances carefully.

You can also charge different prices for different audiences. Some distribution companies charge more for universities and academic buyers than for nongovernmental organizations who want to use the tapes. Find out about the standard practice and price range in your country or region, and charge accordingly.

Retail outlets

Typically, only the most commercially successful activist documentary videos will be distributed through retail outlets in this way—usually only after they have been released in cinemas. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which has become the highest-grossing documentary of all time, is distributed from mainstream retail outlets.

However, the vast majority of advocacy videos do not reach the huge commercial success of this type of movie—and yet there are opportunities for retail outlet distribution. When documentaries become "important" to a local community, it may be possible to persuade local retail owners to sell videotapes "due to popular demand." In the past, campaigns have been organized specifically to persuade such store-owners to distribute these important videos.

Equally, there are opportunities to distribute videos via other retail outlets such as at conferences, fairs, and gatherings.

Distributors

A traditional way of distributing your video is via a distributor. This is an organization, person or company that has built up a reputation and the capacity to distribute videos, either via broadcast media, theatrical release or through retail outlets.

Many producers make use of distributors to help with overseas distribution. Some of these distributors are non-profit and activist in orientation (such as Undercurrents) and have helped many producers gain distribution of their video tape on international news channels such as CNN, MSNBC, Sky News, and BBC. An example of this is when Ken Saro Wiwa took shocking footage of massacres of the Ogoni Tribe in the Delta region of Nigeria. These images were passed to Undercurrents, which was able to get them

on to news channels around the world. Other distributors focus specifically on social justice issues, although they hope to find a commercial market for these films. There are also distributors who focus specifically on the educational market, including high schools and universities. If you are looking to engage student activists, these distributors can be a good resource to work with to ensure your video is in university library collections and is used by teachers.

Alternatively, other distributors are run on a commercial basis. These distributors typically provide a service for a fee based on a percentage of the royalties for the videotape sold (see Resources chapter for more information).

Ten tips on duplication distribution

1. Organize a marketing campaign before you make copies.
2. Collect orders in advance.
3. Find a duplication business that will make high quality copies quickly.
4. The more copies you make, the cheaper the duplication costs will be; fronting costs may be more cost-effective in the long run if you think you can predict the sales or distribution quantities.
5. Do not make more copies than you think you can distribute.
6. Check the tape/DVD for the quality of the video and the audio before giving it to someone.
7. If possible, design an attractive jacket cover for the video box.
8. Include order and contact information on the cover.
9. Include issue-related written material with the video, including a call to action such as a sample letter to the relevant authority, and a screening guide.
10. If you had donors for the production itself, return to them for funding with your distribution strategy. They may be as committed as you are to ensuring the video has maximum impact!

TARGETED DIRECT-TO-DECISION-MAKER DISTRIBUTION

Direct-to-decision-maker

One of the most successful forms of video distribution over the past few years has been the direct-to-decision-maker ("D2D") method. This section explores ways of getting your video directly to the people or group you need to influence.

Depending upon the decision-maker's personality, the political climate, the nature of the issue, and the constraints facing this person, the decision-maker may be receptive or hostile to your requests.

Therefore, do your homework in advance to determine whether you need to employ the carrot or stick approach to D2D distribution.

With the "carrot" approach, you may wish to treat the decision-maker as a potential ally and demonstrate why it is in this person's interest to abide by your suggestions. Cooperation in this case is likely to be mutually beneficial.

With the "stick" approach, you will need to apply economic, political, or public pressure on a decision-maker who may not otherwise comply (i.e. publicizing your demands to the public and/or mass media while engaging in D2D distribution).

Here is a list of some methods of D2D distribution:

- *Hand-to-hand*: This is where a campaigner literally places a copy of the video into the hands of the decision-maker. It may also be effective to enlist a respected and trusted intermediary to help convene the screening or pass on the tape for reasons of safety, credibility, publicity, and influence. The benefit of this method is that it is simple. It requires no arranging of meetings or official agreements. The disadvantage is that you do not have a formal meeting to discuss the contents of the video or to resolve issues. And worse, the decision-maker can throw the tape into the garbage bin when the messenger has left his or her presence.
- *Private screening*: A video advocate organizes a private screening of the campaign video for the decision-maker. This may be the only way to show the video to this person. This method has the advantage of confidentiality and trust. It is a gentler method than the public screening method described below. For example, the Comité de Emergencia Garífuna de Honduras, in Trujillo, Honduras, created a video showing community members speaking about economic development and discrimination issues, and asking on-camera for concrete actions in meetings with decision-makers. They then brought this video directly to high-level officials from the capital city and demanded action. Combined with other video strategies, the government is finally beginning to respond to their demands. One disadvantage of this method is that decision-makers can offer you things in private, which they later withdraw. The Brazilian Kayapo tribe's answer to this is to video all private meetings so they have a record of any agreements made.

- *Public screening with decision-maker present*: The video is screened before decision-makers in front of a public audience, often in the presence of people affected by the issue. The advantage of this method is that the audience will remember the reaction of the decision-makers and hold them accountable for their words and actions. For example, CEOSS in Egypt produced a video about a polluted canal that has become a public health threat. Opening with images of the filthy waterway, the tape features interviews with a variety of community members, who each address the problem. The finished tape was shown to over 200 villagers in front of key officials. As a result, filling in the canal has become a priority among local leaders and officials.

  Another advantage of this method is that if any journalists attend, they can record the event and use parts of the advocacy video in their news coverage. The disadvantage is that most politicians will not attend if they have not already previewed the tape or do not agree with its contents.
- *Video letter*: This is where a "letter" is sent to the decision-maker from the campaign group or the local community affected by the issue. The "letter" includes footage of the problem, testimonies from the "victims" or "advocates," and the description of what they want changed. Amazon Watch, a US-based advocacy group working on issues in the Amazon Basin, has had great success with this method. It is usually also publicized to the media, so they can assure that the decision-maker receives the video letter.

Direct approaches to decision-makers are often combined with other forms of distribution. As Table 7.2 shows, D2D is the shortest route to the decision-maker. However, screenings and networking can include a strategy for persuading the audience to contact the decision-maker, and can generate a greater groundswell to complement your direct approach. Screenings can generate community involvement that may make the project/campaign more sustainable. Although the mass media/Internet, because of its broadcast approach, has no guarantee of ever reaching a decision-maker, it can create a political context that adds pressure on a decision-maker. Ideally you should think of using an integrated strategy and "sequencing" the different methods effectively.

Table 7.2 What is the shortest path to a decision-maker?

D2D (direct-to-decision-maker)	*Screenings*	*Media*	*Tape duplication and distribution*	*Internet*
Group ↓	Group ↓	Group ↓	Group ↓	Group ↓
Decision-maker	Community ↓	Medias ↙↓↘	Network ↓	Internet ↙↓↘
	Decision-maker	Public ⋮↓	Decision-maker	Public ⋮↓
		Decision-maker		Decision-maker

D2D distribution is suitable for:

- Governments and elected representatives
- Corporations and shareholders
- Power-brokers and opinion-formers
- Community leaders
- Human rights commissions
- Intergovernmental and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and UN
- National and international nongovernmental and civil society organizations

Ten tips for direct-to-decision-maker distribution

1. Research the issue carefully.
2. Identify the key decision-makers.
3. Identify intermediaries who can help you get to these decision-makers.
4. Keep the video short—decision-makers don't usually have much time—and try to make sure they watch it with you.
5. Check the video for quality before you leave.
6. Before the screening cue the video to the best starting place.
7. Check the equipment before any screening.
8. Have follow-up materials including recommendations for change, policy briefing guidelines, and contact details.
9. Leave a copy of the video with the decision-maker.
10. When appropriate, invite the mass media to attend the screening or hand-off and/or turn the screening into an "event".

Video as evidence

Video can also play a powerful role in the legal process. Around the world, video is being used as evidence to assist in promotion of social and environmental justice. From a distribution angle, video used as evidence can lead to wider exposure by the media, by key decision-makers, and by the public because it is associated with high-profile or significant legal proceedings. For more information on using video in legal proceedings, see Chapter 6.

Case study: Community screenings, network distribution and D2D with *Operation Fine Girl: Rape Used as a Weapon of War in Sierra Leone*.

The *Operation Fine Girl* video was launched in January 2002. The video examines the use of rape and sexual assault during the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone and includes powerful testimonies by survivors, as well as key political actors, human rights experts, and people involved in rehabilitation and support. The underlying advocacy goals were to ensure that gender-based crimes were considered in the transitional justice process, and that communities had an opportunity to begin to discuss what had happened to them. The people who spoke out in the film did so with the hope that their words would make a difference. When they were asked how they would like the film to be used, two of the people featured replied using some form of the phrase "*so people will see.*" Implicit in this is the idea that people will make up their own minds. As one of the young women, Fatmata, says:

> I would like you to show the tape to the international audience for them to see what really happened in Sierra Leone. Most of them have only heard about what happened, so this will make them see that we really suffered—but despite that we are strong and if we are given opportunities we will do better things in life.

Osman, a child-soldier who is featured in the film, hopes that telling his story will lead to understanding, and eventually forgiveness: "I want you to show the tape on TV so that people will see that even though we did bad things we are remorseful."

After an initial broadcast on cable television in the USA (WITNESS leveraged funds from Oxygen Television to produce the program) *Operation Fine Girl* was released in Sierra Leone in January 2002 in

a screening to an audience of over 160 NGO representatives and members of the government that was introduced by the country's Attorney General. Word of the film spread quickly through the capital, Freetown, following several radio broadcasts highlighting the film.

More than 100 copies were distributed to national and some international NGOs in 2002 and 2003, and all the groups were encouraged to use it as a tool for further advocacy. Binta Mansaray, the film's associate producer and the local outreach coordinator, advised organizations on when, where and how to use tape for maximum impact, to draw attention to issues raised by the documentary, and to campaign for policies and programs that responded to the special needs of the victims/survivors. She arranged and led many screenings, often in open community settings with large audiences, and in some cases using a mobile generator and TV screen in remote or rural areas. Co-hosting was by a wide variety of organizations ranging from women's groups and investigators of the newly formed Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to schools and churches, women's groups and health clinics, and United Nations organizations.

Operation Fine Girl helped sensitize communities to the notion that women and girls did not voluntarily leave their families to join warring factions but were instead abducted and forced into sexual slavery. Seeing the stories of people like themselves gives community members an opportunity to start discussing their own experiences. Screenings of the film within communities also spurred former combatants and others to come forward with their own testimony about events during the war.

Audiences of up to 500 and 600 people have attended large-scale screenings in communities all over Sierra Leone. Responses range from shock, to tears of relief, to occasional comments that the events belong to the past and should no longer be discussed. But overwhelmingly audiences say that the film should be seen by as many people as possible.

Binta Mansaray also reached out to key personnel involved in the transitional justice process—including investigators of gender-based crimes and violations of child rights—for whom she coordinated screenings to sensitize them on the situation and to provide them with a training tool for others.

Operation Fine Girl was also used to sensitize traditional leaders responsible for administering customary laws that relate to gender

issues. Changing attitudes among local leaders is critical, as customary laws promote community stigma and ostracize women who are raped and suffer sexual violence of any kind. In 2002, for example, the National Forum for Human Rights screened the tape for 33 traditional leaders in Kenema Town during its TRC sensitization. The leaders were shocked at the testimonies and said it was painful to watch what women went through. Some of them asked for additional copies to show to their community members.

Key allies and an important source of funding for the efforts in Sierra Leone are the international NGOs and multilateral institutions. The tape has been used as a powerful source of information for international partners to get a clear picture of what women and children went through during the war, including audiences in the UK, Canada, the US, and South Africa. The film's numerous international public screenings have included film festivals, international conferences, and major international media including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which aired a one-hour program on sexual violence against girls in Africa, which featured footage from *Operation Fine Girl* and interviews with guest speaker Naomi Wolf and Christiana Thorpe of FAWE, a leading women's rights organization in Sierra Leone featured in the film.

The *Operation Fine Girl* video was effective because the interviewees—everyday victims of the civil war—chose to speak out about the truth of their experience. They told candid personal stories of their own experience—similar to that of thousands of other people across Sierra Leone, yet a collective experience that had barely been discussed. In community screenings, audience members were then able to relate it to their own experience, and start talking about how to respond to sexual violence both as individuals and as a society, in a way that they would not have been able to if they had directly known the people featured in the film.

Another reason why film is so effective is that it reflects the larger process of truth-seeking. Viewers see and learn the names of the women; they also see and hear rebel and military officials confronted about the violence perpetrated by combatants. The inclusion of both perspectives—victim and perpetrator—strengthens the film's credibility and at the same time illustrates a process for uncovering the events of the war, determining responsibility, and preventing similar events from ever happening again.

Many women—and many men—have come forward to tell their stories after seeing *Operation Fine Girl*. Human rights groups were

delighted with the three days of hearings of the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission that were devoted to the war's impact on women and girls, including testimony by individuals, women's groups, NGOs, and international human rights monitors. An additional three days of hearings were devoted to children and youth.

BROADCAST DISTRIBUTION—RADIO AND TELEVISION

> A distribution strategy for your film or video is essential. Although you have just completed your film, you're still only fifty percent done, if that. Now you have to find the best ways to distribute your film to the widest possible audience. Isn't that the point? It's of little use sitting on your shelf, so prepare yourself for an all-out distribution assault. (Paul Shore, Guerrilla News Network, an online activist video and media site)

Using broadcast media

The focus of this chapter has so far been on non-broadcast distribution methods of social justice documentaries. This section looks at broadcast distribution, and complements the information in Chapter 1.

Television documentaries

Submitting full-length documentaries to television broadcasters has been a traditional distribution method for socially motivated filmmakers for more than half a century. There have been some great success stories over the years for this method of distribution. Entire government departments have been established based on the notion of mass education through broadcast documentaries. In addition, in some countries, documentary-makers are paid for the right to distribute their work. This, of course, is helpful when raising funds for the next video project.

Many video advocates often think of an eventual TV broadcast—either of their completed video, or of footage they have shot—as the ultimate goal of producing video. However, this may not be the most practical goal, nor actually the place where your video will have the most impact.

Popular broadcast media has obvious advantages—it typically has a substantial, dedicated audience, and a single broadcast could

reach millions of viewers simultaneously. Once production costs have been met, the video advocate has to pay little in the way of distribution costs (although it may be wise to invest in outreach around the broadcast), so this can be an extremely efficient means of spreading your message. It is also useful for raising general awareness of your organization and your issue, and changing the context of a political debate, as decision-makers often use mass media coverage as a measure of the standing of an organization, and of what issues matter to the public.

In practice, however, broadcast media distribute few videos explicitly made to bring about social change. This is because television (and radio stations) either:

- Have limited airtime
- Create their own programming about the subject at hand
- Fear alienating their viewers, governmental, or corporate sponsors by devoting airtime to controversial or critical perspectives
- Limit videos regarded as having an ulterior agenda
- Reject an advocate's video because its production values fail to meet station criteria, or standard formats
- Believe their audiences do not care about these issues

Indeed, research shows that in many markets around the world, the number of social issue documentaries on TV has been declining, even in places with public television mandates to cover topics of social concern. Additionally, most documentaries on television in Europe and the USA are commissioned programs rather than acquisitions. Rarely will a television program editor take a finished video from a grassroots filmmaker, particularly one with whom they have not worked previously.

Luckily, as we have discussed in this chapter, television and radio broadcast are not the only ways of spreading your message. Non-broadcast distribution methods can be more appropriate and more strategic in creating change. For example, one advantage of these distribution methods is that you can take your video directly to the audience of your choice, removing the editorial control of another group or organization.

If you do decide to try and produce a documentary for television you should research thoroughly a particular channel's guidelines for submission, assess the cost implications in terms of what you will

have to deliver, and consider working with a professional who has experience in negotiating with television channels. Also be aware that television stations typically have standardized lengths and formats for programming. Check with the station you are approaching beforehand to confirm their standards, but the following will give you a starting point:

- Public service announcements (PSAs) are advertisements for issues, and run like standard commercials, usually 15–30 seconds in length. Sometimes, it is acceptable to make 45-second versions, and even up to one-minute versions.
- A half-hour television documentary usually runs for 24 minutes, which allows the station to include a minimum of two commercial breaks.
- "One-hour" documentaries run between 39 and 52 minutes, depending on how many minutes of commercials there are, and whether the station runs news on the hour.

Providing footage to television news

Although it is very hard to get completed documentaries broadcast on television, it is possible in some circumstances to get your footage used in news programs. The key to working with the mass media is contacts. The best approach is to develop good relationships with people who work within the mass media *before* you need to distribute video footage. You can do this by inviting them to events, introducing yourself to them at community meetings, and sending them briefing packs and press releases.

How do you know which journalists to contact? The best way is to watch television, read the papers and listen to the radio. Identify the journalists who cover your issue area and decide if their reporting is generally sympathetic to your way of thinking. Begin building up a contact list. This way you will have the names and telephone numbers ready to hand when you need them. Also tap into trusted networks and allies who may already maintain these kinds of media databases, and with whom you can share information.

Television news can play a major role in your work using video for change. In most countries, television news is the primary or secondary source of information for the public. The news broadcast can give a stamp of "objectivity" to issues that may be hard for activist groups to get, irrespective of the truth of their work. Most

news stations are hungry for graphic video footage that accompanies news stories. And once one station picks up strong footage, other news channels are likely to follow suit. However, they are rarely looking for in-depth human rights or community-based stories that are missing the graphic element.

Around the world, human rights and social justice advocates have found they can supply raw footage to television news. Compared to documentary commissioning editors, news editors are usually more eager to take video advocate's footage than documentary commissioning editors. This is because (a) they have editorial control over the content, (b) they have a daily need for footage, and (c) the intake requirements are sometimes less tightly monitored than documentaries.

For example, Brazilian police were videotaped attacking, beating, and shooting 15 law-abiding citizens in a Sao Paulo shantytown. The 90-minute video shot by an independent cameraman, was sent to the national television station, Rede Globo. The images broadcast clearly show an officer hitting one of the men 39 times in eight minutes. As a result of the video, ten of the policemen were charged.

Another example is the footage shot by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in Afghanistan. RAWA used hidden cameras to document women being executed at the Kabul city soccer stadium. The footage was smuggled out of the country and shown by news outlets around the world. This was, of course, a highly risky undertaking, and this method of creating and distributing advocacy video should be adopted only after exploring the potential risks to the safety of the videographers, those featured in the footage, and the transporters of the tapes. Review Chapter 2 for further information.

Video news releases (VNRs)

> The VNR is a press release in video format. So it says who, what, where, when, and why—very briefly. It is not a documentary or an exposé, or a report. It is designed to make it easy for reporters to cover your issue favorably, or at least cover your message. (Atossa Soltani, Executive Director and *de facto* publicist for Amazon Watch)

A typical way that advocacy groups work with television stations is by providing VNRs, which are short compilations of images and expert testimony relevant to a particular issue you believe the

Figure 7.2 Still of a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo from the video *A Duty to Protect*, distributed worldwide via the internet (AJEDI-Ka/PES/WITNESS)

mainstream media will want to cover. They generally include three to five minutes of B-roll (additional relevant video images that can be used to edit into the material) and brief compelling interviews (ten- to 30-second sound bites) with experts or articulate spokespeople. These interviews should be presented with a separate titlecard including the interviewee's full name and position. Note that news stations don't want to see the titlecards superimposed on the image because they each have their own style regimens. That also goes for the B-roll, so titlecards come first, followed by the interview or image.

Remember that even a VNR requires time to produce and edit, and you should only expend the resources if you have evidence or confidence of the media's interest in your material. VNRs are most effective when they are timely, as for example when there is:

- An upcoming decision or vote on an issue
- A campaign (a boycott campaign, or consumer education, etc.)
- An event being publicized (e.g. "Come to Earth Day")
- An exposé (e.g. on a massacre in Colombia and the role of a US oil company)

- A position statement relating to a pending decision by legislators (e.g. "Why there should be no drilling in the Arctic")
- The launch of a new report, a new project, a new park, facility, vaccine, ad campaign, etc.

The message is the most important aspect of the VNR. After you watch it you should be able to walk away with one core message such as: "Oh, I get it: The group does not want tax dollars to fund the destruction of this tribe or place," or, "More military aid to Colombia is going to increase human rights abuses, so Congress should reject more military aid." If you choose to use a narrator, the narrator should sound as credible as the people interviewed. The tone should be more like a news report than an activist presentation.

Challenges of supplying footage to TV news

- News editors have in the past given video advocate footage to police/authorities, which may endanger the videographer or the subjects, depending upon the context
- News programs will normally use only a small amount of footage (maybe only 15 seconds)
- News programs may misrepresent the story
- News programs are normally only interested in highly graphic and dramatic footage (violence, protests, destruction, arrests)

There are a number of issues you need to decide before going down the television news road:

- What story or issue do *you* want covered?
- Do you have connections in television news? Who do you know in television news?
- Will TV stations take "freelance" or "independent" footage (or footage from NGOs or human rights organizations)?
- Do you have the agreement of your subjects to broadcast their interviews? Under what constraints?
- What part of your story will TV news editors be interested in? Is the story interesting enough for TV broadcast? Is it of good enough quality? Does it contain footage that is typical of the news program? Is it something they cannot film themselves?
- Will the television broadcast help or hinder your campaign? Issues to consider here: do you trust the broadcaster to frame the

issue fairly or supportively? Will the agency of your organization or the community involved be highlighted? Is your tape safe with the TV station?
- How will you get your tape to the television station? What format do they accept (most will not take VHS)? They typically prefer DV standard or higher.
- Will they return it? Will they hand it to the police?
- How will you guarantee that the footage is not used in contexts you have not agreed to? You may need to use a licensing form that delineates a legal contract.

Eight tips for providing footage to TV news

1. Edit your footage, and make it more user-friendly
2. Advertise your footage through web page and email alerts
3. Make your footage available to the communities where you filmed—don't forget about them
4. Label the tape clearly with your name and address for return delivery
5. Include a basic fact sheet about what the story was about—a press release often works
6. Include a rough list of the contents of the tape, in order of action, with approximate times, including the names of all those interviewed, with their titles and, if needed, their organizations. The station will then be able to scan the written summary for potential footage of interest.
7. Include a letter or contract with the terms of your agreement for broadcast, and ask for payment for your footage. It is a useful way to raise money *and* the footage will be treated with more respect. Consider enclosing a proposed license outlining available uses. Is it available free of charge, or for a fee? Do you have all the necessary consents, releases and rights to be able to license the material? Are you offering it for multiple use, for an unlimited period of time, or do you want to limit the period? Are you offering exclusivity or is it a non-exclusive license?
8. If you want the station to work with you in the future, make sure your material is accurate, contains no slander or libel, and is of high quality, interesting for the viewer, and topical.

Outreach in coordination with broadcast

Remember that your work is just beginning once you have a commitment from a broadcaster to do a story or to air your documentary video; to take maximum advantage of a broadcast, you must have a plan in place to capitalize on a forthcoming broadcast. For example, when the national US broadcaster ABC's *Primetime Live* program agreed to produce and air a 12-minute segment on Gillian

Caldwell's investigation into trafficking women from the former Soviet Union (discussed in Chapter 1), she alerted allies within the US Department of State who had the ear of the Secretary of State. She knew that the broadcast would precede the Secretary's visit to the Prime Minister of Israel—and hoped that since the broadcast focused on trafficking from Ukraine to Israel that she might be able to get trafficking on the agenda for the visit. Sure enough, the broadcast resulted in a request from the Secretary's office for talking points, and the topic of trafficking made its way on to the agenda of a top-level bilateral meeting.

Another example of ways to capitalize on a mainstream media broadcast is to use it to drive viewers to your website to take action on what they have learned about. WITNESS worked closely with producers of the internationally televised *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to provide video for a program on sexual slavery in Africa. As part of the licensing contract to provide the videotape at reduced rates to the program, they negotiated for an onscreen and Oprah-narrated reference to the WITNESS website. Then on the WITNESS homepage, they created an online action resource for people tuning in after *Oprah* to capitalize on their momentum and desire for engagement.

A third pre-broadcast strategy is to network and encourage house parties when you know a broadcast important to your issues is scheduled to take place. Be sure that your house party host volunteers are equipped with background information and concrete calls to action so that they can ask their visitor viewers to get involved on the spot.

The web can be a great location to provide further information and provide ways to act in locations where Internet access is widespread. In the US, programs produced for public television often have extensive websites that are worth looking at as examples. For further resources on off-broadcast outreach and lessons learned (in the US, but potentially applicable elsewhere), visit <www.mediarights.org>.

Community television alternatives

There are a number of alternative television distribution strategies. They range from managing a program on community television to owning a television station itself! Some of the benefits of this option include:

- High degree of editorial control

- Building a long-term institution that can serve all the diverse issues of a community
- Becoming a forum and a focus for the community

Running a community program

Many communities around the world manage social justice programs on their local television stations. This happens in much the same way as an independent producer would provide a documentary to a traditional television broadcaster or make a regular series. The great advantage of this approach is that you don't have to worry about running a television station.

One of the lessons learnt from cable access television in the US, which had no quality control, was that the poor programming attracted a near-zero audience. However, it is also true that niche programs on cable can have a very strong and loyal following. As with a community screening, a committed, even if small, cable access audience may be useful.

Running a community station

The second, far more ambitious option is to establish your own television distribution station. This gives the great prize of controlling your own schedule. Of course, the problem is that you must first find a way to establish your operation (which may or may not require governmental approval). Many countries will not give permits for community television. And if they do, they often limit what can and cannot be broadcast.

You must also raise the considerable resources to maintain your operation. A small, low-powered community TV station has a start-up cost of anywhere between $10,000 and $200,000 (including transmitter, camera kits, edit suite, playback). And then you must cover the annual running costs (staff, tape-stock, electricity, repairs, telephone, rent etc.).

One of the burdens of owning your own television station is that you must fill the airtime every day, every week, every year. This must be balanced by the need to attract an audience to your programming.

The trick, therefore, is to fill the airtime with programming that is going to appeal to your audience and that you can afford over a long period of time, and to mix this with material created to support your advocacy or social change goals. One solution to this is to mix

acquired programming (attractive shows that other people have made) on a low-cost basis, with programming that you have made by yourself.

The great advantage of low-powered television is that the social organization owns the broadcast distribution itself. For example, the Kurds in northern Iraq ran their own low-powered television network after the First Gulf War in 1991. At first this was a low-tech operation. Recently, as funding has increased, the Kurds have been able to distribute a great amount of high-quality programming. This television network has been key to building the sense of community within Northern Iraq and unifying the region around certain issues.

Case study: Soap opera—using fiction for social change advocacy

A feminist group in Nicaragua called Puntos de Encuentro wanted to use media advocacy to address some of the post-revolution social problems in the country. First, they created a newsletter called *Boletina*, which spread like wildfire through the countryside. The newsletters became famous for running political stories directly beside readers' favorite recipes. Then Puntos de Encuentro turned to radio, with hit programs about social issues affecting women.

Soon they began considering television. They decided to create a soap opera called *Sexto Sentido* that would run every Sunday afternoon. It is a fictional series—which they describe as a "politically correct" version of the American sitcom, *Friends*. The show follows the lives of six young people living in a section of Managua.

Amy Bank, executive director of the show, points out:

> Our TV show is the centrepiece of a multi-pronged advocacy strategy. It's not just a TV show for the sake of a TV show. We want to reach a national level audience. It's a fairly sophisticated organizational strategy, with the newsletter and the radio. The TV show is the hook to get people interested in the issues… The advantage of an episodic soap opera is that it allows you to make the problem much more complex. There are no neat solutions in half an hour. No instant solutions. The situation can stay complex, and the problem can deepen—like in real life. You have to trust the audience.

After they air each episode, all week long, they program related material on the radio show, linking in to the relevant issues. "It's a powerful way to address human rights, creating characters that

through daily life confront conflicts and find remedies," says Liz Miller, who made a documentary about the project. "They engage in the daily practice of exercising human rights."

Amy insists:

> what we do is advocacy, but it's important not to preach. We have a point of view, we have a distinct way of seeing the world, but we try and focus and making people relate to the characters. Minds don't open with one TV show, but it can spark dialogue, and that's what we're trying to do. Real social changes are a long-term messy process.

Radio networks

Strange as it may seem, radio can provide an excellent forum for distributing video footage. Radio stations typically have smaller budgets than television stations and are often looking for good sources for stories. They also have the advantage of reaching a number of new audiences—the "captive audience" of car commuters in urban areas, as well as people in rural or remote areas, which may not have good television coverage, and where people are unable to afford a television.

You will be providing the audio track only to the stations. Therefore, they will be looking for high-quality sound recording, descriptions of surroundings, background sounds, and interesting interviews. They will not be interested in footage that relies heavily on the visual component.

When providing footage to radio stations, you can simply take your camera to their edit suites and copy the audio track to one of their audio recorders. Bring along your cables in case they don't have ones that fit your camera sockets.

Make sure you sign a license agreement with the station (similar to television agreement above). This will limit their use of your audio recordings, and it will also detail if you are to be paid or not.

DISTRIBUTION USING THE INTERNET

Over the past ten years or so, the Internet has become a powerful tool to advance advocacy initiatives across the globe, despite unequal access to technology worldwide. From women's groups in Afghanistan to news portals in Dubai, it is now possible to distribute video on the Internet. The global network of Indymedia sites has demonstrated the

democratic potential of the Internet to become a space for expression for many.

For video advocates with access to limited Internet equipment, there still remain some important distribution opportunities for your work.

Strengths of Internet/web distribution

- *Mass audience*: The Internet can be a mass media outlet. You can reach a large number of people who have access to the Internet with little effort. From an online audience you can also generate an offline audience, as the MoveOn.org example above (p. 248) shows.
- *Global exposure*: Theoretically, people around the world will be able to access the material.
- *Targeted*: You can build up a database of people who are interested in your work, who can then be informed quickly of new material online and action they can take. This then becomes essential to mobilization and fundraising.
- *Low-cost*: The Internet can be cheap, compared to similar mass media distribution outlets. These costs may depend on if you are being charged for the server and to stream video.
- *Quick distribution*: You don't have to wait for an organization to distribute your material. You can do it yourself, immediately.
- *International distribution*: Via email, it costs the same to email someone in the next-door village as to another country. This is very useful for international networking.
- *Viral potential*: An email link to an appealing or compelling video is often forwarded on to others. On the web, an email to thirty people, who each send the email to thirty people, who each send an email to another thirty people, who send to another thirty people, etc., would eventually reach one million people.

Choosing an Internet-based strategy: Your material, your capacity and your audience

The Internet is NOT a good distribution strategy for everyone. Before you use this strategy answer the following questions

- Does your target audience have access to the Internet? Is it familiar with using the Internet? Is their access fast enough to watch video?

- Does your material work for the Internet? Review the guidelines in Chapter 3 on what works well for the Internet.
- Do you have the ability to put video on the Internet? Will your Internet service provider accept your footage? How much will they charge to stream it?
- Is there an effective way to take action or mobilize people using the Internet? If you are going to use an e-action format, will you need to pay for it in order to use an efficient system?
- Is there a better strategy for reaching your audience? Consider creating a flash video, for example, which can accommodate much slower bandwidth.

If you do decide to stream video online:

- Pick a technical format and stick with it, so viewers will return and not have to get new software.
- Make sure that your Internet service provider will not take out, edit or reject any controversial content. If possible, establish your own streaming server.

It is also useful to know that some organizations dedicate themselves to the distribution and publicizing of grassroots, alternative, progressive, and human rights videos via the Internet. For more information, see the Resources chapter.

Case study: Broadband-based mobilization in South Korea

by M.J. Kim, Korea Daewoo Workers Video Collective

South Korea has the highest level of broadband Internet access in the world. Labour unions have utilized this to broadcast meetings and actions live to their members.

On April 10, 2001, several hundred workers of Daewoo who had struggled against mass layoffs two months before gathered together in front of the factory gate to enter the union office located inside the factory. They had got a warrant from the court that they had the right to use the union office space and marched peacefully. Suddenly, the riot police attacked the workers and violently beat them. On the spot, there was one cameraperson who was a member of Daewoo workers' video collective and he shot every detail of this incident (see <http://dwtubon.nodong.net/english/>).

Figure 7.3 South Korean video activists in action (Labor News Production)

Immediately, people around the country came to the website and saw how the government was violently oppressing the workers—most of whom were seriously wounded and some paralyzed. This incident and the subsequent Internet webcast had a real impact on the politics of the day and people's attitude towards the government.

MULTI-PURPOSING AND SEQUENCING

An advocacy campaign can develop and implement several distribution strategies for the same video—"multi-purposing" an investment in video for maximum effect. Often, these different distribution approaches complement one another.

An important facet of distributing the video to multiple target audiences is "sequencing." This is the strategy of using the momentum or attention generated by one successful distribution method to open

the doors to further distribution. For example, a legal decision may generate attention that can be leveraged into a television broadcast, which may then give the opportunity to hold a private screening with senior government decision-makers in which they are convinced to take action.

Case study: Behind the Labels

Here is an in-depth example to show you how this process can work. The example is *Behind the Labels: Garment Workers on US Saipan*, a 45-minute documentary produced by Tia Lessin for WITNESS and Oxygen Television in the US. The video tells how, lured by false promises and driven by desperation, thousands of Chinese and Filipina women pay high fees to work in garment factories on the pacific island of Saipan—a US territory exempt from normal minimum wage laws—and about the labor and human rights abuses they are subjected to on the island. There was an unusual element to Oxygen's involvement. Unlike the majority of television documentaries, they actively encouraged the film to be developed with an advocacy audience and usage in mind.

Figure 7.4 Global protests against sweatshops from *Behind the Labels* (Oxygen Television LLC/WITNESS)

There were multiple change objectives for the film including:

- Pressuring the US Congress to take more legislative action.
- Building consumer pressure on Gap and other clothing retailers to settle a lawsuit related to the situation in Saipan.
- Providing a more general campaign and educational tool for groups working to curb sweatshops globally.

The distribution strategy employed by this campaign is described in Table 7.3, showing how the project unfolds, the audience changes, and the campaign builds.

The *Behind the Labels* video was part of a campaign led by Global Exchange and United Students Against Sweatshops, and including UNITE!, AFL-CIO, WITNESS and other groups that resulted in major clothing company, Gap and other manufacturers settling workers rights claims in a landmark lawsuit. Workers received back pay and damages from a $20 million settlement fund and an independent factory-monitoring program is getting underway. Legislation in the US Congress is stalled at the time of writing, in the face of strong opposition from powerful politicians with links to the garment industry.

Five tips for sequencing and multi-purposing

1. Plan your distribution strategy before you start production. Work out which distribution strategies will build on others. Which strategy should you carry out first?
2. Contact your key allies as early as possible. Involve them in the process and ask their advice.
3. Be flexible—things don't always go according to plan.
4. If you see a new distribution opportunity, take it!
5. Remember, distribution is about having an impact on a targeted audience.

Bearing all these ideas in mind, I hope you will be able to use and learn from the ideas, case studies and experiences in this chapter, and develop your own effective distribution strategy.

Taken together, the tools we've provided in this book should help take you down the road to successful video advocacy. With good planning, careful production, effective and ethical editing, and strategic distribution you can achieve the change you seek. Good luck!

Table 7.3 *Behind the Labels* distribution

Target audience	*Action sought*	*Method of distribution*	*Timing*
General public, particularly in the USA	Direct viewers to online advocacy campaign, lobbying legislators in the US to take action to reform the situation, and asking garment manufacturers to improve conditions	Broadcast television in USA and in Australia	First eight months of campaign
Solidarity and activist groups in the US working on sweatshop, labor and human rights issues	Take part in protest and letter writing campaign to pressure companies involved in legal action on Saipan to settle, and US government to enforce existing law and implement new legislation	Community screenings around the country, with supporting materials to facilitate taking action in protests, and letter-writing. Video embedded in existing campaign, and complementing other advocacy. Also screenings hosted by key allies and leadership of community allies	First eight months of campaign, with community screenings focused on one week in lead-up to Congressional screening
Law-makers in Washington, DC	US government to enforce existing law, and implement new legislation. Put pressure on companies involved in lawsuit	Face-to-face meetings, and screening of film hosted by speaker with personal experience of conditions	After community screenings around country
General public in US	Contribute to global campaigns to raise awareness on sweatshops	Broadcast television and film festivals in US. Via distribution to 300+ libraries in the USA with screening packs	During initial broadcast of the video, and in years 2 and 3 after production of video
General public globally, as well as anti-sweatshop advocates in Asia	Contribute to global campaigns to raise awareness on sweatshops	Via translation into Chinese language version for use in China, and broadcast and film festival distribution in Australia, Israel, across Europe, and in other countries	In years 2, 3 and 4 after production of video