



Roxane Barbat



Fred deWysocki

Building & Expanding Brand Accessibility

In 2002 Fantastic Films International entered into the international distribution business and in 2005, they attended the Cannes Film Festival for the first time. The company set itself up on the basic principles of good business, with a mandate to give fair reporting to producers, and branding the company in the rooted knowledge that cementing relationships with the buyers was the main ingredient of success. Three years later, how have they fared? Has the business changed to such an extent as they might have been imagined? Have they accomplished the goals they set, have those goals changed, and how easy was it to adapt the changes necessary to move the company forward? The Business of Film talked to Roxane Barbat, President, and Fred deWysocki, Partner, in Fantastic Films International.

Over the last three years the landscape for films in both production and distribution has changed so markedly that the industry no longer talks about the internet or new technology, but more about how do we position our company in this paradigm that, via technology, is a whole new ballgame and playing field. There are numerous independent film companies across the globe, and many of them are addressing that vast playing field by attempting to carve out a specialty label, as companies in the Asian hemisphere are largely turning the coin back to front and producing films that are Eurocentric with Asian actors, themes and stories. One particular brand of content, Animation, has increasingly found a growing audience among moviegoers worldwide, in part because it's no longer an anomaly. As the box office for Animation product soars, led by the major studios, independent companies are finding the ability to be a source for augmenting the theatrical line-up of independent international distributors who are hungry for product that is unavailable to them due to the majors' monopoly in many territories.

Generally speaking, an animation movie takes 2-3 years from concept to the box office, and it's mainly in this spectrum of the marketplace that Fantastic Film led by Barbat and deWysocki have positioned their company as it and the market place have evolved. In answer to what extent they have had to change the basis on which the original business plan was based, Fred deWysocki said: "Originally we had contemplated that we could brand Fantastic Films International as a company. However as the marketplace and the company have grown, we have targeted branding with a different approach, for example our relationship with the Spanish-based animation production company Dygra Films. The company is an award winning animation company that has created its own brand of animation with a great deal of

*helping producers create
a brand of their own so they
are known for a certain
type of product*

success in Europe. They brought us on board to expand their brand, make their pictures more universal, and to help them break into the US marketplace. The same is true with our feature, Agent Crush, in that when we came on board, the task was to help to improve the positioning of a unique but regional British project. From our involvement in reworking the script and business plan, as well as assisting with the cast and the financing, we ultimately changed it into a Hollywood project with international appeal. It's much more about building and expanding the brand accessibility, working with the international buyers, and making the product even more profitable if it's currently profitable or making it profitable if it's not. Many people consider branding for film to only apply to aspects of merchandising. When we at Fantastic Films International talk about branding, it's much more from a strictly business point of view in the marketplace. When you go to a shop you look for a certain brand of a product because you know it to be unique and reliable, buyers come back time and time again to buy the branded product. That is what we are currently doing with our company, and in doing so, we are helping producers create a brand of their own so they are known for a certain type of product. Our question is how can we help them improve their brands? Many of them have already started building their own brand, with a stronghold in their own local marketplace. With Dyrga and the other producers we are working with, it's a case of how to work alongside them,

look at what they are doing well and how to improve upon that, how to improve the production value and how to attract more investors and buyers for their product."

With the global financing market changing dramatically over the last three years, the restriction of UK tax rebates and elimination of most German funding, Fantastic Films International has found that the involvement with their stable of producers has moved from sales agent to include executive producing and a more active participation with producers, getting involved in the project as early as possible. The overall shift has resulted in the independents looking more to co-productions and shifting the product to have more global appeal. Fred deWysocki continued: "With Agent Crush originally, when we came on board, the film was fully funded, then fell apart because the UK financing fell out. That put us in a position to look at the project and determine how to help them restructure the business plan to be more attractive to equity investors. The project didn't have any equity investors the first time around, and after our involvement, the project was fully financed with only equity investors. We did a number of things to accomplish that. We re-worked the script so that it had more flavor of a Hollywood product, broadening the audience, and we looked at casting and brought on bigger names. Concerning the Dygra product, they were looking to better compete on a global market against more competition from Asia and other emerging countries, with production costs going north as they improve their production value and move into digital 3D, the next level of appeal for audiences worldwide. They also needed to gain distribution access into the lucrative North American market. In this instance Fantastic Films

Continued on page 16