



Sexual deviance

*UK film-makers break the mould again with self-distribution on **Scenes Of A Sexual Nature***

The film-makers behind British comedy drama *Scenes Of A Sexual Nature* have been subverting standard industry practices from the start. Now, not convinced by offers from UK distributors, director-producer Ed Blum and executive producer Suran Goonatilake have decided to distribute the film themselves.

Self-distribution would generally be considered the film industry equivalent to representing yourself in court but the film-makers, including fellow executive producer Vadim Jean, have overcome the apparently unsurpassable obstacles laid before them so far. With Aschlin Ditta's final script finished on July 13 2005, Blum was determined to start production on August 1 despite only having one actor, Hugh Bonneville, and a couple of crew members already on board.

"Everyone thought I was mad," says Blum, who was told time and again it could not be done. Nevertheless, on July 31 the shoot was under way.

Blum was also determined to approach Britain's best acting talent, but with a budget of \$224,000 (£120,000) — it would grow to \$486,000 (£260,000) after investors saw the film and provided further post-production costs — the production would be offering equity minimums. Armed with a transparent back-end business model that allowed cast, crew and investors to track money through a collection agency, and a script that required cast members to work only two days each, he assembled stellar UK names such as Ewan McGregor, Sophie Okonedo, Dame Eileen Atkins, Catherine Tate, Adrian Lester, Gina McKee, Tom Hardy and Andrew Lincoln.

Record release

Scenes Of A Sexual Nature will release on November 3 in the UK and Ireland on 35 screens, the biggest release of a self-distributed film in the territory. And *Scenes* will not be limited to small cinemas: after hiring UK distribution sector veteran Martin Myers to book the film it will screen in some of the area's best-performing cinemas, including the Cineworld Renfrew Street in Glasgow, Cineworld Dublin, Showcase Bluewater in Kent, Odeon Printworks Manchester and London's Vue West End.

Myers' involvement is indicative of the film-makers' approach. They may be self-distributing

but they are not trying to do everything themselves. They have created a virtual distribution company, The Really Honest Little Distribution Company, and in turn have brought in top consulting talent. This includes Sarah Wilby Creative Publicity to build publicity, which involved a press junket with McGregor, Tate and Lester, and Lester's appearance on Channel 4's *The Paul O'Grady Show: Organic Marketing*, part of Target Media; and UK company Wonderland, which cut a trailer and TV spot.

Long lead

The film-makers understand the importance of a long-lead approach on a limited-release film. "We don't have the marketing clout to hit people over the heads in the final week before release. Early publicity is important to build word of mouth," admits Blum. The company has also been using community websites such as MySpace and YouTube to its advantage, including posting vodcasts under the banner *Scenes Of A Sexual Nature: Undressed*.

"These sites enable us to generate interest on the internet," says Blum. "It appeals to this new generation who want to get involved and you can talk directly to them. It's not the only marketing tool, but it's free and allows film-makers to show clips and behind-the-scenes material."

If the film can achieve a \$5,600 (£3,000) per screen average over its

opening weekend and add a further 20 prints to its run, the UK Film Council is committed to providing a further \$150,000 (£80,000) to the \$37,000 (£70,000) invested to help further marketing.

However, November is a busy period and *Scenes Of A Sexual Nature* opens over a weekend that will see much of the UK population attending fireworks displays in celebration of Guy Fawkes Night (November 5). The biggest problem, however, will be Twentieth Century Fox's *Borat*, expected to be one of the biggest successes in the territory in November, which opens wide the same day. The following week then brings direct competition in Icon Film Distribution's *Starter For Ten*.

The approach is generating interest from other film-makers in the UK and US. The film has sold — through The Works — to Australia and New Zealand (Madman Entertainment), Russia (Russian Report), Poland (SPI International), Portugal (Prisvideo), Turkey (Bir Film) and Israel (Shapira Films). Negotiations are underway with US distributors and two studio majors have made offers for UK DVD rights.

Robert Mitchell



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