



**AOTEAROA SCREEN  
PUBLICISTS COLLECTIVE**

## **Your Art, Your Audience(s) and You**

**Guiding questions to help New Zealand filmmakers identify, grow and connect  
with your audiences.**

“People want to be involved and it’s difficult because as filmmakers our instinct is to protect our process and protect [our] film, and not have us distracted.

But the truth is, if you finish your film and then look to build your audience, it’s too late.”

—Yance Ford, director of *Strong Island*, in an interview with Indiewire

This resource was created in 2022 for [Script to Screen’s FilmUp Mentorship Programme](#) by [Aotearoa Screen Publicists Collective](#) founding member Gemma Gracewood.

## Introduction

If you want your film to be seen and loved, shared and rewatched, then you must be thinking about who your story's audience is, thinking about the kind of relationship you want to have with them, and creating your own plan for connecting with them.

Along the way, you'll talk to many people who know what they're doing, who will love your work, and will love to get it to your audiences. But having your own head start is always ideal. Even when your film's publicity and marketing team creates a strategy of their own, you'll want to have your own north star.

This is not a definitive instruction manual for building an audience. It's a set of questions designed to ignite your thoughts around what "audience" means to you, how *you* experience life as an audience member, and where you can have impact as you create your film and hit the road with it. The hope is that you'll uncover your personal superpowers — both in the Theian task of shining light on the world through the art of film, and in the Herculean task of getting people to buy tickets to it.

"Film is the art form closest to actual experience. That's why we need to make our own movies. To render ourselves visible, to gather the tribes, to camp in the dark, to be enthralled and disturbed and delighted and enlightened. Strangers. Together." —Gaylene Preston, from *Gaylene's Take: Her Life in New Zealand Film*

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## Your Art

"When I'm working on scripts, I'm actually constantly referencing the audience. In fact, I'm always putting myself in the place of the audience. I'm always going, 'Okay, me, the audience member, are going to see *blank*.' I'm actually trying to be in the mind-set of the audience member who doesn't know anything and that has never taken anything for granted." —Michael Showalter (*Wet Hot American Summer*), [Vulture Festival](#)

You'll be asked about audiences at every stage of the development and filmmaking process. As artists, it can be distracting and even intimidating to be thinking about those future people in the dark while you're still in the process of creating. But the reality is you're *already* thinking about them when you are in the flow of your story.

When you decide who knows what, when; when you appoint one character to explain the stakes; when you're storyboarding a camera angle; when you're thinking about how to affect the emotions of the person watching; when you approve an iconic costume design... you're thinking about your audience.

"I'm really thinking about that when I write: I'm obsessing about the emotional journey of the person watching, and how they are the main character of the film. This is an obsession through writing, and then it's also an obsession on set because that's how I talk with the actors. We are talking about the people watching. I'm thinking about the impact of the film." —Céline Sciamma (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire, Petite Maman*)

### **Reflections about your art:**

Why are you making your film? (That's a clue)

Who is your film about? (That's another clue)

Who are you making it *for*? (That's another clue)

Who needs to see it? And who will want to see it?

What role do you see your audience playing in the creation of your work?

What role do you see the audience having *inside* your work?

Who will pay for your film?

How much do you need to raise?

How can crowdfunding help you build your Core Audience?

Can you break your fundraising up into parts (pre production, principal photography, post, etc)?

How can that help you build your audience across different parts of the process?

Who can you collaborate with to proactively build your audiences together?

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## **Your Audiences**

"There's also the concept of taking care of the audience. In other words, there is no movie without an audience. Movies don't exist unless there's someone there to watch them. So they've given you their trust. They've given you their time. So it's like, are we taking care of them?" —Michael Showalter (*Wet Hot American Summer*), via [Vulture Festival](#)

The economics of filmmaking at any level below blockbuster make very little sense, and every funding agency, financing partner and individual investor will have many questions about who will buy tickets and pay for streaming downloads.

Most New Zealand films (bar *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Taika's *Thor* films) are made for niche crowds here and overseas, rather than the mass market—because most Aotearoa filmmakers don't have the resources to make a film that attracts a mass market.

Niche is where our heart audience is; the ripples made by skipping stones on a lake. The more you and your collaborators skip those stones, the more potential circles of people your story can reach. You're making movies, and television, because *you* love them. It's helpful to reflect on your own habits and relationships as an audience member and consumer, and how you have supported other creatives in amplifying their work.

“The image I had in mind when I was writing the film, and thinking about the kind of impact that I wanted it to have, was a mother and a daughter watching the film in the theater. Them getting out of the room, running to catch the bus, but they run differently. They run differently together and maybe it will be just for this ride. Maybe not. But they feel it. They look at each other and they feel it.” —Céline Sciamma

### **Reflections about audience:**

What do you watch?

Where do you watch it? (At home, at the cinema, festivals, film societies)

How are you influenced to watch something new?

Which streamers are you subscribed to?

How do you choose what to watch from their menus?

Which film festivals do you go to (or dream of going to)

Which independent and mainstream cinemas are *you* a member or regular of?

How do they tell you about new films?

What email lists are you subscribed to?

Do you collect physical media?

When you see a film you love, how do you tell other people about it? Who do you tell?

What is your current understanding of what it takes to build an audience?

Who can you talk to in order to learn more about this aspect of filmmaking?

What is your current knowledge of how film marketers identify an audience?

Do you already have a core audience?

When you think about that skipping stone, what corners of your life could it touch on as it hits the water?

What organisations or groups are you involved with, in and beyond the screen industry?

What organisations and impact partners does your story connect with?

Do you have any email lists that you've built up over the years, for crowdfunding or other reasons? What's the barrier to starting one now?

## You

“At no point did I surrender the decision making to other people. I want to be involved with who sold the film. The more people you meet, you have feelings about who understands what you are doing and how to build a team around your film. Casting those roles is as important as casting your actors.” —Eliza Hittman (*Beach Rats, Never Rarely Sometimes Always*) [in conversation with Indiewire](#)

Who you are, what makes you unique, and what binds you to your community tell you how you are *already* equipped for the job of supporting your own story, and where you might need help. It’s not just about box office; it’s about whether you get to do this again—for yourself, or for someone else who likes what they see in your work.

You need energy and resilience to sustain a release campaign across months and years of festivals and release windows, both online and in person. And there are some aspects of audience service that are highly specific to the New Zealand experience: our personal connection to the work (more often than not we are making personally important projects than doing a gigging job), and the lengths we need to go to get it to the world (jetlag and our national humility are genuine challenges for Aotearoa creators attending festivals overseas! We need to turn up and be “on”!)

“There’s always this tension between ‘I want the audience to love me’ and ‘I don’t care if you love me.’ I’m going to challenge you, but please like me. Our work has always been trying to struggle with that, and this one, we kind of said, ‘I want them to love me.’ —[Daniel Kwan, co-writer and co-director of \*Everything Everywhere All at Once\*](#)

### Reflections about you:

Are you on social media? Which one/s and why?

What filmmakers do you follow there?

Are you on Letterboxd? How do you use it? (To create lists of inspirations? To follow other filmmakers? To engage with people on your own film’s pages?)

Do you have head shots? And if you do, do they give people a sense of who *you* are, what genre sandpits you play in?

Do you have a one-paragraph biography that reflects your interests and personality?

Ever thought of engaging a publicist for yourself? Why/why not?

How do you see the role of the publicity team on your film set? Are they considered part of your crew even though they are not involved in “getting the minutes”? How can you made them feel welcome?

Have you had experience of the media circuit for a film or television release, or anything else? How was it for you? How would you like it to be different?

Do you care about who sells your film? Do you want to be involved in that part of the process?

Which filmmakers and artists do you admire in terms of the way they carry themselves online and in the world?

Do you watch EPKs and special features?

What is your favorite behind-the-scenes photograph from a film shoot, ever?

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## Final Notes

“In a lot of my films the biggest theme is family, making families out of those around you.”  
—Taika Waititi

Hold your audience gently while you make your art.

The more you can do to demystify the world of marketing for yourself, the less weird the process of connecting with audiences will be. After all, “influencer” is merely the latest word for the most old-fashioned, free tool in the publicity toolkit: word of mouth. And word of mouth is all about relationships: the relationships you already have, the relationships you build along the way, and the relationships you form once your film is out in the world.

Get some media training if you find talking hard. When you’re on the festival and publicity circuit, talking opportunities range from quick red carpet answers through to hour-long Q&As, and each media outlet wants a slightly different version of the story, a fresh anecdote from the set.

“I make films to get the conversation going. To shine a light into something that’s bothering me, to illuminate the kinds of lives you don’t see in the movies much. The invisible ones.” —Gaylene Preston

Keep a written or audio or visual diary of what you're going through. Share your journey. Normalise failure and setbacks! Know that it's okay to ask for help. Keep a list of the films and other art you are referencing and taking inspiration from. Take your own photos. Keep in mind any material that could become publicity assets.

There's a lot you can't often control. Who designs your poster. What your film's marketing campaign looks like. Who interviews you. How people perceive you. How people review and rate your film. Whether a major event will happen the week your film is due to open.

But there's plenty you can have power over: How *you* tell your story. Your own communication channels (social media, email lists). How you respond and react. Creating time in your day for proactively building your profile and engaging with your audience. Having clear boundaries around the rest of your time. Keeping in touch with likeminded people you meet along the way. Getting rest and staying healthy.

“You try to make the best movie you can and it takes a long time to be able to understand how the movie can have an impact on the audience. Actually, it happens when you see the movie for the first time with an audience.” —Luca Guadagnino (*Bones and All*, *Call Me By Your Name*)