



# on location

A Monthly Insight into the Current Indie Film Self-Distribution Market



## Creating Indie Appeal

*Making a good first impression counts!*

**How I Made an Award-Winning Indie Movie and Landed It on Amazon Prime on my first attempt.**

Creating an independent film that garners awards and secures a spot on Amazon Prime is a remarkable feat, particularly for someone like me, whose first foray into filmmaking was sparked by a simple realization during a movie night.

While watching a film one evening, I noted the regular intervals of commercial breaks—every 26 or 27 minutes. Intrigued, I started counting the scenes between these pauses, identifying five to six scenes per segment. This observation led to a key insight: a feature film could be structured around 20-25 pivotal scenes.

But knowing the structure was just the beginning; the next, larger challenge was crafting a compelling narrative.

As a fan of Sherlock Holmes, I was drawn to the mystery genre. I chose to create a "locked room" mystery, where a crime is committed under seemingly impossible circumstances. The task was to craft a plausible yet surprising resolution without resorting to supernatural or illogical explanations.

Dialogue is essential in any film but can be challenging to render authentically. My unconventional approach involved starting heated debates on Craigslist forums, in rooms related to my planned storyline. This provided raw, unfiltered dialogue that I could adapt for my characters, effectively capturing diverse perspectives and the complexity of human emotions through real interactions.



Drawing on personal experiences and those of people I knew, I developed characters and motivations. The antagonist was shaped by combining traits from individuals generally disliked, adding depth and relatability to the story. The script nearly wrote itself as I pieced together life and conversations.

The filmmaking process was a profound learning experience, involving extensive research in human biology for character development, hazard aerodynamics for scene effects, and an understanding of governmental regulations affecting our outdoor shooting locations and even our indoor AirB locations . Every element contributed to creating an authentic and professional production.

However, to be fair, the movie isn't without its flaws. The production looks amateurish, with issues in scene selection, lighting, and audio quality that did not meet professional standards. And it will never be considered a commercial success. Despite these shortcomings, the film received awards targeted at new directors, producers, and writers. These awards often recognize the sheer effort required to complete a film—considering that 80% of indie films never reach completion. Additional recognition came from a visually striking poster I designed and an engaging trailer I produced. While the execution was flawed, the plot and storylines are robust—so much so that I challenge anyone to unravel the mystery of the killer's identity.

My background as an Environmental, Health, and Safety Industrial Hygienist played a crucial role in this endeavor. Though seemingly unrelated, the discipline and rigorous attention to detail required in my profession were invaluable in managing the complex elements of filmmaking. This included story development, compliance with regulations, and ensuring crew safety.

The skill sets from diverse professions intersect uniquely with filmmaking needs, particularly in an indie setting where resources are limited, and multitasking is essential. For example, engineers' problem-solving skills can inspire efficient set designs or special effects solutions. Similarly, CPAs' expertise in financial stewardship is crucial for managing a tight budget, while architects' understanding of space can influence set design and scene composition. Medical knowledge helped enhance the authenticity of scenes involving health issues, and legal expertise ensures compliance with regulations governing film production.

The post-production phase and the journey to film festivals and eventually to Amazon Prime were equally challenging. Skills required for conducting an environmental Phase 1 site-assessments mirrored the post-production quality control (QC) phase of the film. Both processes demanded thorough research, systematic inspection, stakeholder communication, adherence to standards and legal compliance, and risk mitigation. These competencies ensured the film was compliant, and ready for distribution without additional risks or liabilities.

The final product not only reflected a well-crafted narrative arc but also demonstrated the culmination of an interdisciplinary approach to storytelling. The accolades received at film festivals and the acquisition by Amazon Prime affirmed the quality of the story and the broad learning and diverse experiences involved in the project.