

ENTERING FESTS AROUND THE WORLD

(how to think big)

I have always thought big. It's shocking to me when people don't, because thinking big means you believe you have something big to give to the world, and doesn't everyone have something big to give to the world? No matter how small? I believe we all do.

Think big!

Anyhow, I'm a dreamer, I think big. So, when I told some haters I was going to enter *Lunch Ladies* in festivals all over the world, they laughed.

"WTF? The Lunch Ladies abroad? Clarissa, c'mon."

It's true. *Lunch Ladies* is as American as it comes – it's about two murdering high school *Lunch Ladies* in love with Johnny Depp. Doesn't get more American

than that. In fact, Mexico doesn't even have *Lunch Ladies* or a WORD for *Lunch Ladies* - there's no such thing as a Lunch Lady and many countries are the same.¹³

But remember my goal? To prove my comedy/horror film could play all over the world? So even though I felt a little crazy and scared (I don't like to fail either and I could definitely fail) and frankly a little egotistical (how dare I think *Lunch Ladies* can play outside the USA?) I decided I wouldn't listen to the haters and enter it in foreign festivals. Besides, I love meeting people from different cultures, and I knew I wasn't gonna meet them if I didn't enter the film in festivals outside my home.

Most Americans don't know jack about entering film festivals outside the USA and I was no exception. I had to do a lot of research, trial and error (lucky you, you just have to read this book) to figure out how to do it.

¹³ The international premiere for *Lunch Ladies* was **Mórbido Festival** in Mexico City and the film has screened many times in Mexico – including **Feratum International Fantastic Festival**, **Post Mortem Festival** (where the film won second place - Honorable Mention Red) **Festival De Cine Y Comedia**, **Kino Muestra** and **Stuff MX**.

Let's start with platforms, and I don't mean the shoes. Though I do love a nice platform.

PLATFORMS

A platform is a site that a film festival contracts with to collect films for their viewing.

In the old days, and there are still many festivals that operate this way, especially in Europe, you would have to submit your film directly to the festival. If you wanted to enter you would have to send them a DVD of the film, a cast and crew list, synopsis, photos, and a fee if one was due. It takes a lot of time to send all this material to each and every festival.

One day, someone got smart and started film fest platforms.

On a platform, you upload all your materials ONCE. You find the festival you want to enter, pay the fee to the platform – who in turn takes a percentage and gives the rest to the festival – and then you hit SEND. That's it.

Huge time saver as you can enter thousands of festivals in a snap.

The platform I use most is **Film Freeway** because it's incredibly user-friendly and is where the majority of American and a good amount of foreign festivals can be entered. However, there is more to life than Film Freeway – not all fests can be found there.

For example, world-famous **Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival** ONLY uses **Short Film Depot** – if you want to enter Clermont-Ferrand (and trust me you do, it's incredible) – the only way you can is through **Short Film Depot**. Other festivals only use Festhome or **IAMAFILM**, while some fests are listed everywhere.

[Reelport](#) (which has been around since 2004) was started as a project supported by the EU to reduce waste (no more DVDs sent to fests, everything done online) and to connect filmmakers to festivals in Europe and around the world.

Reelport has fewer fests to enter than many of the other platforms, but, as mentioned in *Chapter 4*, each fest has been vetted. They research everything from how old the festival is, to website and social media channels, venues, who screens submissions and more - therefore every fest listed is legitimate. If a mistake is made and

one is found to be fake, they refund all submission fees to the filmmaker and ban the festival from the site.

BONUS SIDENOTE - *Reelport has gifted a first-time user discount for readers of my book! Like most platforms, they charge a service fee (two euros) for festivals with no submission fee. They are waiving this for YOU! 100% off! They are also giving a one-time user code of 20% off any submission. Wow! Check the footnote for instructions.*¹⁴

You need to be on as many platforms as you can handle.

I was on six:

- *FESTHOME* – festhome.com

¹⁴ Valid for first-time users of Reelport - go to reelport.com, sign up and search for fests you want to enter. Before checking out, email Reelport at **support@reelport.com**, mention the name of this book and which free fests you are entering - Reelport will give you codes to waive the processing fee. For future use, every free festival has a different waiver code associated with it, so anytime you enter one just email Reelport for the unique codes. For your one-time user code of 20% off festivals with a fee - enter this at check out: **1b5c4438-fffc-4c0e-aa28-4f8e80e026b6**

- *FILM FEST PLATFORM*¹⁵ – filmfestplatform.com
- *FILM FREEWAY* – filmfreeway.com
- *IAMA FILM* – iamafilm.com
- *REELPORT* – reelport.com
- *SHORT FILM DEPOT* – shortfilmdepot.com

Other platforms exist, and they come and go (most recently WithoutABox run by IMDb closed its doors) – three that are popular, but I never joined simply because the six I was using were enough for me are:

- *CLICK FOR FESTIVALS* – clickforfestivals.com
- *FESTAGENT* – festagent.com
- *FILMFESTIVALLIFE* – filmfestivallife.com

You may find you like those, your choice, you don't always have to do what I do, jeez.

In addition, there are still festivals across the world that don't use a platform at all. You have to submit

¹⁵ This made sense for my film; but may not for yours as this platform is only for French Festivals. You will find which countries “get” your film. The French like *Lunch Ladies* – it got programmed a lot in France. Therefore, it made sense for me to be on a French Platform to submit to festivals in France that could not be accessed by any other platforms.

directly to their site like the old days. The entries are almost always free, and it's sometimes difficult to figure out when submissions open, what they want and how to do it. Further, sometimes it's not in your language. But Google Translate it, because I'm telling you, some of the best festivals in the world don't use a platform.

Some of my favorite ones that the film got in that I had to submit through their site were:

- **Bucheon International Fantastic Fest** – *South Korea* - bifan.kr/eng
- **Fano International Film Festival** - *Italy* – fanofilmfestival.it
- **Filmets Badalona** – *Barcelona* festivalfilmets.cat/en
- **Hell de Janeiro** – *Brazil* - helldejaneirofestival.com.br
- **Roxy Underground Film Festival** – *NYC* – www.roxycinematibeca.com

Once you are set up on the platforms, you can easily start filling out your Film Fest Grid by reading the rules and due dates of festivals you want to enter. The fests

that are not listed on a platform, you will have to go to their websites and find information there.

Festivals that speak your native tongue are easy to submit to, but if you decide to go for the gold (ones around the world) there's a few things you need to know.

SUBTITLES

You will need at the very least, English subtitles. Even if your film is in English you need English Subtitles. Why? It's often easier to understand a foreign language by reading than hearing. Programmers may speak English, but they probably read it even better, hence, English Subtitles.

I know what you're thinking, oh, no, that's money to get subtitles!

It is an expense, but English subtitles are relatively cheap (it cost me nine dollars a minute) and once you have them it actually pays for itself because tons of foreign festivals are free to enter vs. American festivals which are seldom free and can cost twenty to fifty a pop.

You only have to get in a few foreign festivals to break even with the cost of subtitles.

The cost of subtitles is based on how difficult it is to get the language translated. For example, English and Spanish are relatively cheap because they are commonly spoken in America. Martian? That'll cost ya. But still, for me, even the more expensive ones paid for themselves by the time the run was over.¹⁶

The company I use to create my subtitles is [Captionmax](#) – they are great, super helpful and very professional. Check the footnote for a special 15% percent discount coupon on your first purchase!¹⁷ Don't say I never did anything for ya.

Captionmax did three translations for me: English, German and Spanish. Every festival I got in other than those did the subtitles for free.¹⁸

There are two types of subtitles – Burned-in and SRT/

¹⁶ German was the most expensive, but *Lunch Ladies* got distribution in Germany on Amazon's Prime Video and further two of the fests it got in – **Landshut** and **20minmax** gave me travel stipends to attend.

¹⁷ For 15% off the first time you use Captionmax - go to [captionmax.com](#) and mention the promo code: **CJacobsonFestBk19**. It expires within one year of this book's publication – so get it soon!

¹⁸ Generous festivals made the following subtitles for *Lunch Ladies* gratis: Catalan, French, Greek, Korean, Italian, Portuguese (Brazil), Portuguese (Portugal), and Ukrainian.

VTT export files. Burned-in subtitles are part of the film itself. SRT/VTT are standalone sidecar text files which can easily be added to your Vimeo file for submission to the festival.¹⁹

What is a standalone sidecar text file?

You know when you are watching a video and it has a little toggle in the corner “cc” and you can pick the language you want to see it in? That’s a sidecar text file. The filmmaker has attached the text file to the video (with Vimeo it’s super simple) and now the viewer can toggle the “cc” on or off and choose from any subtitles the film has.

Nearly every festival will request SRT/VTT and they are cheaper than burned-in subtitles. They will probably be the only type you buy. Captionmax gives you both SRT/VTT together for one price but I mainly used the SRT.

Only once did I have to pay for burned-in subtitles. It’s not common, and many festivals that want burned-in will do it for free for you if you have your SRT/VTT

¹⁹ In the case of **Short Film Depot**, there’s a spot to upload the subtitles separately as well.

files or what's called a Dialogue List - which I'll talk about soon.

BURNING IN SUBTITLES YOURSELF

For the one festival that did require burned-in subtitles - I paid to have it done by Captionmax. There are online programs and apps that you could invest in that may make it cheaper than hiring a company. However, there IS a learning curve. Do you have time for it? I didn't. I also did not know enough about the different type of film files to be clear on what was compatible for screening – as I'm not a techie.

There are some platforms which require a burned-in film with subtitles. This was something I did tackle. The French site **FilmFest Platform** did not have a way to add a Vimeo link (which allows you to attach subtitles). You had to upload the short with the subtitles burned into the film. I decided to do it myself because it was only for programmers to view on a computer, so I wasn't worried about screening problems.

The app I used to burn in French subtitles (by using the SRT file I already had made) was called **Subtitle Burner**, and I got it on iTunes for \$4.99.

It served my purpose and was way cheaper, but I never used it in any other way than for festival entry. More power to you if you figure out how to do it for a festival and trust the file will work to screen in the theater vs. just to be seen on a computer screen.

DIALOGUE LIST

A Dialogue List is used by the festival who will make you free subtitles. It lists the exact lines in the script to the action on the screen.

You don't need to invest in a Dialogue List until it's requested, as you may be able to get away with sending SRT files for a while. Some festivals will make them for you with just that. But eventually, if you are getting in enough foreign festivals, you will need it.

You will also need a Dialogue List for your sales rep to market the film to distributors – if you get a sales rep. So, it is a good investment, but it's not something you need right away if you are short on cash.

You COULD do this yourself, but it's not easy and you don't want to screw up, because if you do, your subtitles aren't going to match the picture. Let a professional do it, it cost me only six dollars a minute to have it done

correctly. I used it over and over and it ended up paying for itself, as every festival that was able to do the subtitles for free with the Dialogue List, saved me hundreds of dollars.

Below is an example of the first page of *Lunch Ladies* that I had done by Captionmax.

LUNCH LADIES

Dialogue List

		[MUSIC]
0:00:07	TITLE	Melvinville, CA
0:00:34	ON-SCREEN TEXT (on envelope)	Melvin High School 999 Cedar St Melvinville, Ca 94865
0:00:35	SERETTA	It came. It came! Okay.
0:00:39	LOUANNE (OS)	Open it.
0:00:39	SERETTA	Oh...
0:00:39	LOUANNE (OS)	Careful, Rett, careful.
0:00:40	SERETTA	Oh. Oh. Oh. "Dear Seretta..."
0:00:48	ON-SCREEN TEXT (on letter)	Melvin High School 999 Cedar St Melvinville, Ca 94865 Dear Seretta and LouAnne: I am pleased to inform you that your Cheesy Burger Bites recipe is the Grand Prize Winner of Cook for Kids Charity. As a restaurateur and lover of the culinary arts. I am thrilled to be part of this amazing event. No child should
0:00:49	SERETTA (ON/OS)	...and LouAnne, "I am pleased to inform you that your Cheesy..."
0:00:57	ON-SCREEN TEXT (on letter)	that your Cheesy Burger Bites
0:00:57	SERETTA (ON/OS)	...Burger Bites recipe is the grand prize winner..."
0:01:02	LOUANNE	What?
0:01:03	SERETTA	(screaming) (laughing) Oh!
0:01:08	LOUANNE (ON/OS)	"As a restaurateur and lover of the culinary arts, I am thrilled to be a part of this amazing event."

CaptionMax

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PROOFREADING YOUR SUBTITLES

I don't know about you, but I cringe when I see subtitles that are misspelled.

Take the time to proofread your English Subtitles and

Dialogue List for misspellings and/or errors. You don't have much control over it in other languages (unless you are bilingual), so you must let go and trust – but you do have control over making sure the festival at least has a correct English file to base it on.

BONUS SIDENOTE – After your foreign festival screening is done (don't be annoying, wait a few weeks as they are BUSY cleaning up from the craziness), ask the programmer if you may have the subtitles they made for your film. It will save you money as you will want them for distribution purposes. Further, you will be a hero if you get in another festival in that country as you will save them time by having the subtitles already. Only ONCE did a festival refuse to give me subtitles.

SUBMITTING

Every week check your foreign platforms for new festivals to enter. Submit to all the free ones you can – why not? What have you got to lose?

If you are consistent, you will discover gems you never knew existed.

I found tons of great festivals this way. Also, take a

look at the foreign ones that have a fee, often it's ten dollars or less vs. American festivals which tend to be around thirty.

In general, festivals in America, Australia, Canada, and United Kingdom can be pricey to enter. Inexpensive or free entries will usually be in France, Germany, Mexico, Spain, Latin America, South America and Western and Eastern Europe. Italy is often free but sometimes charges as well. Read the rules closely to make sure your film fits.

Most platforms also charge a small processing fee (around two dollars) to submit to any festival.²⁰ Check their pricing deals. If you intend to enter a lot of festivals on Festhome, for example, buy a yearly pass. You will come out ahead.²¹

BONUS SIDENOTE - A fun thing to do is make yourself a map on amcharts.com. Check off the countries the

²⁰ Reelport has waived this for first-time users just for reading my book! Check footnote 14 for details.

²¹ Film Freeway has a monthly membership called “Gold,” which may make sense for you as well. Short Film Depot has ticket books – you get a better deal on pricing, the more you buy in bulk.

film screens in.²² It can drive your excitement to enter exotic and remote places!

WAIVERS

A waiver is a discount code that allows you to enter a festival for free. It's totally unfair to the people who have to pay, but it rocks if you score one. Only three times in the whole run did I ever ask for a waiver and these were from fests that the cinematographer on *Lunch Ladies* – Chris Ekstein – had a long track record with and hooked up for me.

Other than that, I didn't ask because I don't think it's fair. Most festivals that charge fees do it to stay in business - they aren't just pocketing the cash.²³ Further, why should I get to enter a festival for free and ride on the backs of everyone else who had to pay?

There are exceptions, however.

22 I made a "Geography Lesson" on LunchLadiesMovie.com (see how I slipped in that promotion for my film – check out my website!). For every country and U.S. state the film got in, I would update the map, teaching ignorant Americans like myself where stuff was.

23 The reason some festivals (mostly abroad) don't have to charge entry fees is because their government supports the arts and subsidizes it.

About six months into the run, film festivals came to me and offered me waivers. If a programmer comes to you asking you to submit, it's only natural they should pick up the fee. I also think it's okay if you're an alumnus like Chris was (however, I don't blame a festival for turning down alumni) and, of course, if you are from a foreign country that has low exchange rates and/or can't send money through traditional means.

Others feel differently about waivers and say one should always ask for them as they can save you a lot of cash. There are also those that believe if you aren't entering on a waiver, the festival won't give your film any weight.

I haven't seen proof of it with *Lunch Ladies*.

We got in more than ninety-five percent of our film fests without waivers. We were offered five waivers to festivals we got in, five waivers to fests we didn't get in and there were loads that just reached out and auto-programmed the film after hearing about it on the circuit or seeing it at other festivals.

Asking for waivers is a personal choice; everyone

has a different take on it, so do what makes you feel comfortable.

COVER LETTERS

A few platforms will allow you to send a cover letter with your submission.

Always have a cover letter. Some film festivals won't read them. However, I know several programmers in particular that look at them closely. It may not make a difference if your film isn't in the running for their festival. But let's say it's between yours and another. They're going to go with the film that took the time to write a nice cover letter.

In your cover letter make sure to mention if you have anyone in your cast/crew that is from the state or country the festival is in. Also talk about wins, reviews, or anything else positive and try to make it personal. Just don't come off like a bragging, narcissistic jerk. Be real, authentic, excited and proud.

This goes without saying, but never put down your film. I know that sounds like duh, but when I started writing cover letters, I would say insecure things like

“It’s not for everyone, but I hope you like it.” Horrible!

Makes you really wanna see it, right? After getting some great advice, I changed that to *“I know you’re gonna love it!”*

Set up a positive viewing expectation vs. negative.

And if they don’t love it? Ignore!

FOLLOWING UP

After every submission, send a short, to the point, email to the festival that your film is on its way and to watch for it. That’s it. It just puts your film on their radar. No need to say how terrific it is or follow up again. Just ONCE and only ONCE do you reach out – right after you submit – *“hey, watch for my film!”*²⁴

Also, for points, take it one step further when emailing foreign festivals.

Write them in their language.

²⁴ Don’t be the obnoxious person asking the fest every other day if they saw your film. Yes, they saw it, but now they don’t wanna program it because you are annoying – see upcoming [flowchart](#).

Google Translate and apologize for Google translating if you have to, but make the effort.

The fact you even tried is stellar. Wouldn't it be annoying if you spoke French and everyone constantly sent you emails in English? It's so entitled. Don't be the self-involved English speaker who makes everyone always read English.

HOW TO BE POPULAR

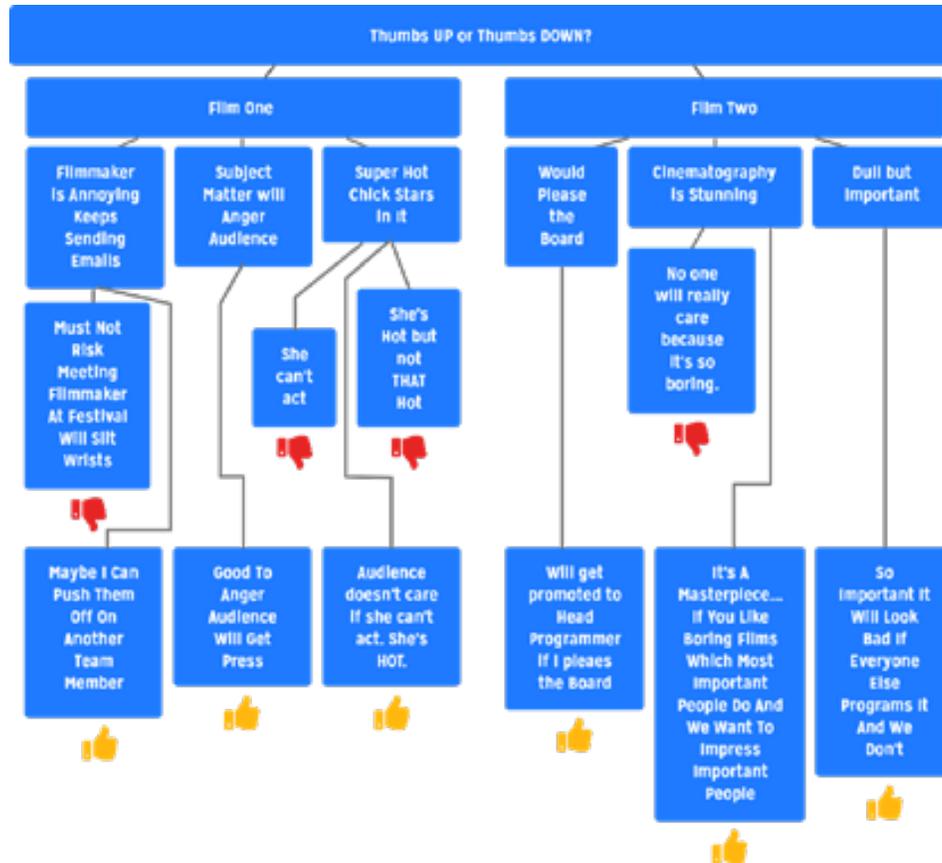
Every single time you get into a festival, win an award or get a review you need to update it on your platform page. I know you already have a ton of stuff you need to keep current - social media, your website, IMDb, press kit²⁵... OMG quit whining, just do it!

Some programmers may not care that you've got an updated platform page. But there are those that do; there are those that actually look.

²⁵ Luckily, you did your press kit ahead of time, so you've uploaded it to your platforms. I would hazard a guess that most filmmakers don't even have one up because they procrastinated. Now, they're so busy they can't do one at all - see how smart you are?

How do they decide between two equally great films?

Flip a coin? Talk to a therapist? Make a complicated flowchart?



Who knows? But I do know you want any leg up you can get. A platform page that makes you look like you have some buzz is sure to be more enticing to a programmer than one that looks sad, lonely and depressed.

Remember, everyone wants to be associated with the popular kid.

Look popular, keep your page updated. ²⁶

²⁶ FilmQuest (filmquestfest.com), a great festival in Utah I loved attending, said they look at everything on the platform when deciding on which films to accept, not just the film.