



IMPA

HOW ONE FILMMAKER REDEFINED DISTRIBUTION, AND HOW YOU CAN TOO

**IT'S HARD OUT THERE FOR INDIE FILMS.
BUT IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE.**

Sharon "Rocky" Roggio, the director of **1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture**, taught us that. Evoke Media granted to her project in 2022, when she was in production. We watched her create a stunning, important film. And then we watched her—and just about every other filmmaker we know—struggle with the realities of indie film distribution. While many other talented filmmakers watched their films struggle to break through, Rocky found a different path. She managed to extend the tail of her film, to meet her audiences where they were and stun them again and again. Today, in 2025, *1946* is still making a tremendous impact. All without that pie-in-the-sky distribution path. Here's how she did it.

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FILMMAKER

NAVIGATING THE MESS AND MAKING AN IMPACT ANYWAY

When Rocky set out to make **1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture**, she thought her biggest hurdle would be telling the story well.

Turns out, *distributing the story* was the real battle.

Despite an overwhelmingly successful festival run—including a record-breaking DOC NYC premiere and more than 25 audience awards—*1946* couldn't secure a commercial distribution deal.

But Rocky didn't stop. She pivoted. She became her own distributor.

The challenges Rocky and her team faced are quite common in indie film. Let us set the scene:

Over the last five years, the streaming boom that once promised new visibility for indie creators has sharply reversed course. Major platforms like Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu have stopped acquiring most independent docs—especially those that don't feature celebrities, true crime, or viral-ready topics. Even films with major festival credentials are being turned away. As industry expert Brian Newman put it in his 2024 [**New Rules for Distribution report**](#), "The majority of streamers are just not picking up indie docs anymore. Period."

Simultaneously, traditional revenue streams have crumbled. The once-reliable transactional market—rentals, purchases, even DVDs—is all but gone. Meanwhile, theatrical distribution has become a luxury few indie filmmakers can afford or justify. Outside of Oscar-qualifying runs or one-night-only events, most theaters simply aren't booking documentaries.

Even for the lucky few who do get their films online, discovery is another battle entirely. The recommendation algorithms on platforms like Netflix or Amazon rarely prioritize independent films, especially ones without built-in buzz. And on social media, attention tends to go to what's outrageous or trendy, not thoughtful storytelling.

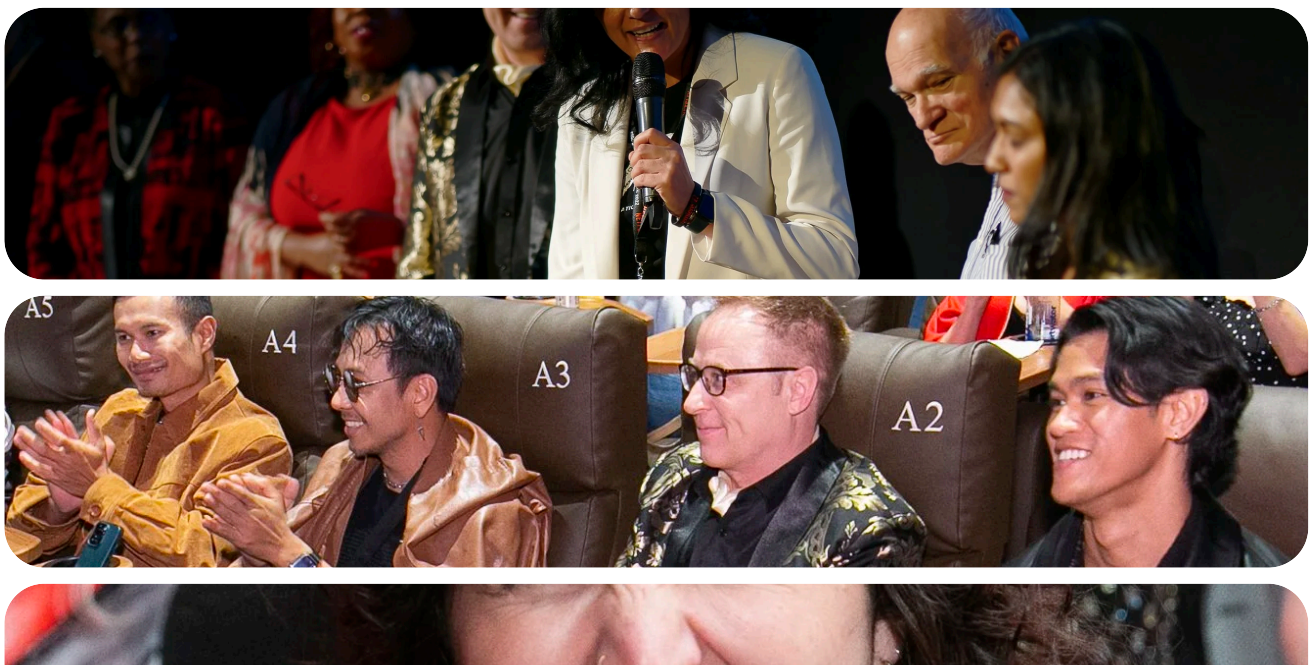
For many filmmakers—especially those newer to the industry or working outside traditional power structures—these challenges can feel impenetrable.

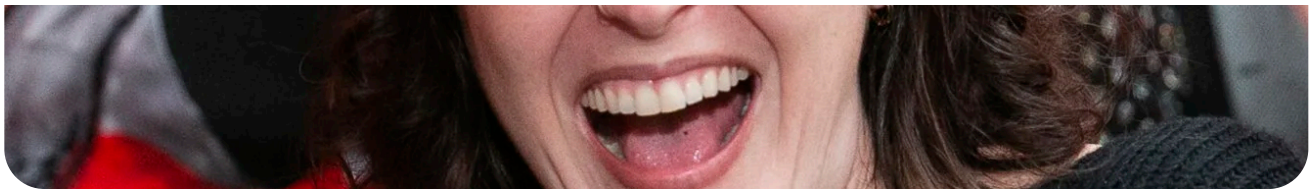
But here's the twist: audiences still want these stories.

According to Keri Putnam's *US Independent Film Audience & Landscape Study*, nearly 77 million people say they're interested in independent film, but only 37 million actually watch it. That's a 40-million-person gap—not a lack of interest, but a lack of access.

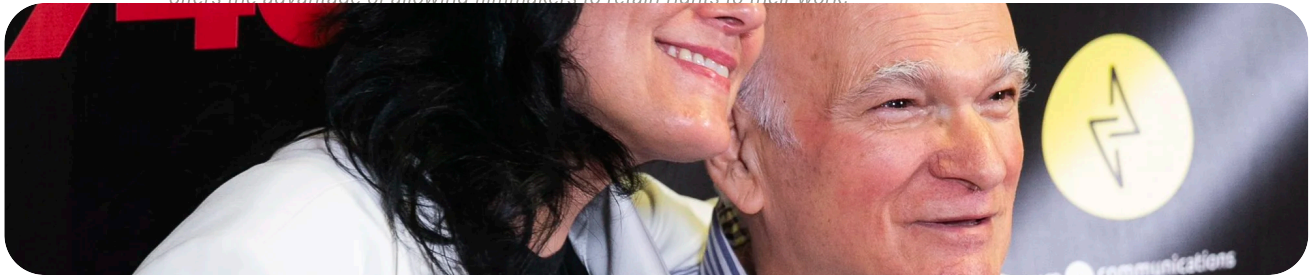
So, the good news? Your audience is out there. They're just scattered, underserved, and sick of scrolling.

The challenge? Reaching them—not through broken systems, but by building something smarter and more direct. That's what Roggio did. In the next section, we get into exactly what she did and why it worked.





offers the advantage of allowing filmmakers to retain rights to their work.



AUDIENCE

FIND YOUR PEOPLE, AND NO IT'S NOT EVERYONE

“Knowing who your audience is would be the most important step. Then go out and find them, whether it's on social media, at the conferences of like-minded people, wherever that might be. And then don't be afraid to engage with them.” - Rocky Roggio

When you're pouring your heart into a project, it's tempting to believe that everyone should see your film.

But here's the thing: when you try to reach everyone, you often end up reaching no one.

Getting specific about your audience allows you to actually find them, meet them, engage them, and maybe even mobilize them.

Newman captures this perfectly:

“Make a film that's film festival and distributor proof, meaning it doesn't matter whether you get into any film fest, or if no distributor buys your film, because you have such a sizable potential audience that is hungry for your film, that you can go directly to them and succeed. This is my new recipe for success: identify these groups of audiences, and build a brand for them—and you will profit.”

In other words: Your audience is your power. Find them early. Build for them boldly.

DEFINE YOUR NICHE AUDIENCE, GO WHERE THEY ARE, AND ENLIST THEM FOR HELP.

“In the beginning, I felt so strongly that this movie clearly impacts the whole world,” Rocky told us. “But there is a niche within that world, and those are the people that I really needed to engage with in order to get this message out.”

Along the way, Rocky realized that while *1946* had global relevance, her core audience was far more specific.

“So I went about working to find that audience. I followed [film subjects] Kathy and Ed to the Queer Christian Fellowship conference, and that's where I met most of the core audience that we needed to partner with and engage with to say, ‘Hey, I need help making this movie.’”

This simple statement became a call to action that drew in support from around the world. Rocky's directness—something so many avoid out of fear or pride—became the driving force behind the film's momentum.

At the conference, she didn't just meet future viewers; she found critical partners, supporters, and even her first major donors and executive producers:

“There were 1,500 people at this conference, and thank God we found [executive producers] Todd and Teresa soon. To make a project like this, it's either time or money. And the fact that we were able to engage with our executive producers that we met so early on made all the difference. It allowed us to go from concept to completion in just four years, which is remarkable for an indie documentary.”

By getting specific about her audience, she tapped into people who were passionate about what she was doing. That core audience helped fund, share, translate, and champion the film from the inside out. They also became some of her early followers on social media—something that would change the entire trajectory of *1946*...

MAKE THE MOST OF SOCIAL MEDIA

If you're currently drowning in production logistics, chasing grants, or clawing toward a locked edit, the idea of launching a social media presence might feel impossible—or even absurd. But what if we told you that doing so just might change everything?

One of the most powerful things Rocky did wasn't shooting or editing or grant writing. It was building a movement—on social media—long before she had a film to share.

With zero brand presence and nothing but an idea, she started posting on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. She talked about the mistranslation. She invited people into the research process. She let herself be visible, raw, imperfect—and over time, her transparency attracted over 250,000 followers who didn't just watch her journey; they joined it.

“I wore so many hats on this film and so many that I never even expected,” Rocky said. “Producing, directing, writing, editing. I had to learn [how to do] all the social media content. I [was] doing TikToks in my forties, like who am I?”

Maybe the idea of being in front of the camera, particularly for social media, horrifies you. Maybe your to-do list feels crushing already. That's valid. But this isn't just *extra* work. This is the work.

And it can pay off. Big time.

"Without social media, we would be years behind in producing this film," Roggio said. "[It] was pretty much the leading factor in not only building the audience, but getting the funding that we needed. We raised half [of our budget] through social media, just because people were able to see what we were doing and then say, 'Oh, I can help you.' I did a post while we were filming at [film subject] Kathy Bullock's house, and somebody was like, 'You're making a movie about her work? I love her work.' That ended up being a \$54,000 donor. Or another time, we were doing technical post-production, and we got slammed with licensing fees that we weren't expecting. And I was like: What am I going to do? How am I going to pay this? And I just did a random post. Literally, the next day, a guy wrote me, and was like, 'Are you still making this movie? Do you need help? I can help you. What do you need?' And I was like, '\$25,000.' And he sent us the money."

So, yes: post before you're ready. Before you have perfect lighting or a polished cut. Post when it's messy. Let people behind the scenes and into the process. Make a movement as much as you're making a movie.

ROCKY'S TRUE AUDIENCE



NOT QUITE

The whole world

"If you do not have a plan for how to reach your audiences, then you are not going to reach the audiences you're trying to get to."



ALMOST

LGBTQIA+ people who had been hurt by the church

SARAH MOSSES



NAILED IT

Their families and loved ones, especially those grappling with exclusion

RESOURCE:

ANOTHER WAY TO THINK ABOUT AUDIENCES

Impact Distribution expert Sarah Mosses of Together Films encourages filmmakers to categorize audiences into four distinct groups. To maximize impact, tailor your outreach, marketing language, and screening locations to each segment. Find out more about the CAST method [here](#).

COMMERCIAL

Those we know may buy a ticket or license to see this film

AFFECTED

Those who are directly affected by the issues in the film

SUPPORTIVE

Those who are supportive of the campaign message

TACTICAL

Those who have the power to effect major change on the issues

STRATEGY

IDEAS FOR DISTRIBUTING INDEPENDENTLY

There's no one-size-fits-all path to independent distribution success, but there are certain things you should keep in mind. This section outlines what Rocky and her team did with *1946* and *why those were smart moves*.

But before you talk distribution—before even stepping on set—you need to get radically clear on what you want your film to *do*. As Mosses puts it: “The question is: *What change do I want to see as a result of this film?*” Do you want to change the world? Grow a career? Make money? Reach an audience?

This clarity will shape every decision that follows.

Rocky always knew that the most important thing to her was exposing people to the information in *1946*. In her mind, that meant the goal was global distribution on a dominant platform (Hulu, Netflix, etc.).

“I really believed that this would be a no-brainer for international global Netflix. The Bible impacts the entire world, whether you're religious or not. And our approach in the film was non-threatening. But I was a little naive [...] so I had to kind of take a step back. It was a rude awakening for me, but I didn't let it discourage us.”

When she took that step back, Rocky saw that the goal did not have to change, but her tactics did. So, she “switched gears to working to find alternative distribution options [...] and then working on impact, which is really the most important thing in the film: getting the film to the community, working with the community, providing them more resources, and providing them hope,” she told us.

We'll get more into the impact side of what Rocky did in the next section, but first, let's look at two of the main ways she independently distributed *1946*: a theatrical run and going direct-to-audience with Eventive.

THE THEATRICAL RUN

With support from executive producers, Rocky launched *1946* into theaters herself, booking venues in New York, LA, and London to qualify for the Oscars and BAFTAs. There were a couple of reasons for this. First of all, it gave people more opportunities to see the film. Remember the social media community we mentioned above? They were continually asking when they could see the film. Secondly, these cities allowed *1946* to qualify for the Oscars and BAFTAs, which raises the profile of the film even without a nomination.

She also hired a publicist to help spread the word and get write-ups in [*Parade*](#) and [*The Guardian*](#). This endeavor came with a price—upwards of \$75,000—a cost she covered with an impact grant from Evoke Media, a loan from two of her existing EPs, and revenue from Eventive ticket sales (more on that below).

In total, the theater run cost \$73,000:

- \$0 - Theater Run in NYC, Fees waived, 1 screen per day for 7 days
- \$6,000 - Theater Run in Los Angeles, 4 screenings per day for 7 days
- \$11,000 - Theater Run in London, 1 screening per day for 7 days
- \$52,000 - Publicist, Rocky's first donors graciously gave her a \$50k loan in October 2023, which she repaid by February 2024. Additionally, an impact campaign grant from Evoke Media covered \$7,500 of the publicity cost.
- \$2,000 - Team's travel to select screenings

THE FILM COLLABORATIVE

For help booking community screenings, the team turned to the **Film Collaborative**, a nonprofit that works to secure bookings for the film through partnerships with festivals, churches, conferences, community centers, and private events.

DIRECT-TO-AUDIENCE WITH EVENTIVE

Towards the end of 2023, roughly a year into the festival circuit, Rocky and the team were approached by Eventive, one of the leading platforms for film festival distribution. *"They let me know, 'Hey, your film is selling at the film festivals, you can do this on your own,'"* Rocky explained.

With no traditional distributor stepping forward, Rocky and the team decided to move forward. In December 2023, they launched a "limited virtual theatrical run" via **Eventive's Virtual Single Film platform**, reframing it not just as streaming but as a ticketed digital

cinema experience. This approach gave them complete control over timing, revenue, and access while still creating the sense of exclusivity and urgency that drives engagement.

In just six months, *1946* sold over 6,000 single-view tickets, organized approximately 500 watch parties across 25 countries, and grossed \$118,000—enough to cover team expenses, repay a publicity loan, and keep the film's momentum strong. For a documentary funded entirely by grants and donations, with no equity investors to pay back, that's a major win. Most indie docs don't break even, let alone recoup five figures in grassroots revenue. On top of that, *1946* became one of the top five most-viewed films on Eventive that year and was later showcased as an official Eventive Case Study at the IDA's Getting Real conference.

WHY THESE WERE SMART MOVES

Eventize everything

Rocky treated every screening—whether at a festival premiere or a church basement Q&A—as an *event*. That decision wasn't just creative (or delusional); it was strategic. Events generate urgency, community, and visibility.

Own the pipeline

When distributors offered deals that required handing over rights for 15–20 years, Rocky walked away. That decision allowed her to self-fund her theatrical release, launch on Eventive, and use the profits to fuel further outreach.

Own the information

Eventive gave Rocky the infrastructure to sell tickets globally, host over 500 watch parties, and gross \$118,000—all while maintaining control of her film. Even better, Eventive's backend tools (ticketing, geo-blocking, email capture, DRM) were built for independent distribution, giving Rocky and the team access to valuable viewer data—insights typically inaccessible through commercial streaming platforms.

The significance of having direct access to audience data cannot be overstated. While major streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video collect extensive viewer analytics, they rarely share this information with filmmakers. By contrast, platforms like Eventive provide filmmakers with robust back-end tools—ticketing data, geo-blocking controls, email addresses, and real-time viewer analytics—so Rocky could see exactly which countries were buying tickets, how long people watched, and who to re-engage via targeted emails.

EVENTIVE CASE STUDY

IMPACT

PRODUCE A GREAT IMPACT CAMPAIGN (ON YOUR OWN)

IT'S STILL GOING TO COST YOU

*The road trip and corresponding web/podcast series required a budget of approximately **\$70,000**. A portion of this cost was covered by a \$30,000 grant from E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and a \$2,500 grant from Evoke Media.*

*The remaining funds were primarily paid for through Eventive profits and supplemented by community crowdfunding efforts on GoFundMe and Eventbrite. Additionally, the **1946** team sold t-shirts and accepted cash donations during the tour, and Making Things Right contributed \$5,000 to support the editing of the web series and podcast. See a detailed breakdown of expenses [here](#).*

BUILD STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

A great impact campaign is built on collaboration. Whether it's a nonprofit that aligns with your message, a church offering a venue, or an influencer amplifying your screening, you need partners who care.

What Rocky did:

Rocky called upon Paul Swearengin, known to 131,000 TikTok fans as Unconventional Pastor Paul, a pastor, author, and coach with the message: "God is NOT mad at you." Pastor Paul—and his hundreds of thousands of followers—came along for the ride.

She also enlisted local faith leaders and high-profile community figures at each stop to increase credibility and reach. By partnering with organizations like Free Mom Hugs and Mama Bears, Rocky ensured that each event felt like more than a screening—it was a community-driven experience.

EQUIP YOUR AUDIENCE

Impact isn't just about watching; it's about *doing*. After the film ends, your audience should be ready to take the next step. Whether it's recommending the film, hosting a screening, sparking a conversation, or supporting a cause, give them the tools to act.

What Rocky did:

Rocky created a comprehensive ecosystem around *1946*:

- A podcast and YouTube series for continued learning
- A resource
- Social medi
- A discussion

She also kept the result, viewers fel discover new con often more effecti ambassadors of y

"If you don't ask, you don't get what you need. And we're not afraid to ask."

ROCKY ROGGIO

online. As a t most audiences line buzz are rs into

RESOURCE:

IMPACT CAMPAIGN ADVICE

START EARLY & BE STRATEGIC

Begin outreach and relationship-building as soon as possible.

LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with organizations and influencers who can amplify your message and connect you to their like-minded audiences.

CREATE ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Keep the conversation going long after the film ends with resources and direct audience interaction.

EMBRACE ASKING FOR SUPPORT

Most people want to help. If you give them the time to do so and you actually ask, you'll often be surprised.

SUMMARY

THE SYSTEM IS TOUGH. YOU'RE TOUGHER.

YOU'VE GOT THIS

If you've made it this far, you already have the grit.

The truth is, the system was never built for independent, mission-driven, or marginalized creators. It rewards scale over soul, trends over truth, and buzz over bravery.

And yet, here you are, still trying to get your story told. Still trying to reach people. Still trying to make something that matters.

That means, you're not just a filmmaker.

You're a builder.

A strategist.

An entrepreneur.

A community organizer.

A movement maker.

And you're not alone.

Rocky Roggio didn't have a giant budget, a big platform partner, or an industry stamp of approval. She taught herself fundraising, gear, editing, marketing, distribution, and impact—all while staying fiercely independent and true to her vision.

She made mistakes. She got doors slammed in her face. But she also made a film that sparked real conversations in real rooms around the world.

So, here's your invitation:

**MAKE YOUR OWN MAP.
CHOOSE THE ROAD THAT FEELS RIGHT.
AND WHEN THE SYSTEM SAYS NO?
LET YOUR STORY BE AN EVEN LOUDER YES.**

FINAL TOOLS + TAKEAWAYS

- Bookmark this page
- Join our **newsletter** to stay up-to-date
- Follow Rocky's work at 1946themovie.com

HAVE QUESTIONS?

**GRAB A
ONE-ON-ONE CONSULTING SESSION WITH ROCKY ROGGIO AT
\$150/HR**

INQUIRE

WANT MORE DIRECTION?

**START WITH OUR CUSTOMIZABLE WORKSHEET TO PLAN YOUR
NEXT IMPACTFUL PROJECT**

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