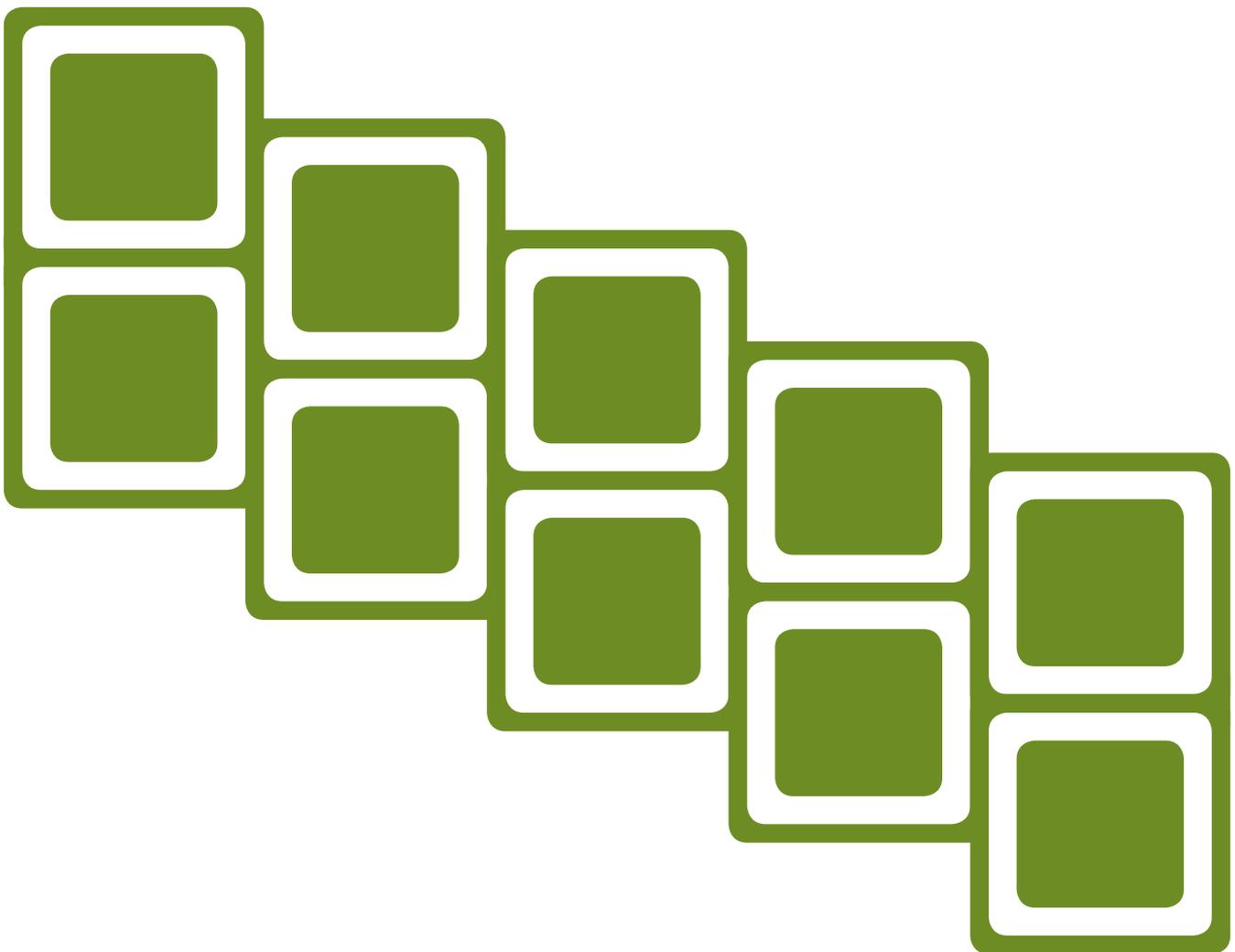


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Summer Film Festivals for Kids: Building Fond Memories and Brand Identity

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Abstract

A summer film festival for kids provides a great opportunity to serve your local community, bring families on campus, and raise your school's image as visitor friendly. Because a festival generates significant media attention, it can also be a valuable tool for marketing other summer programs. While curating a film festival can be time-consuming and expensive, it does not have to be. Economical to organize and market, the KIDS FIRST! Film Festival presented each summer by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is nationally recognized and enthusiastically supported by the media. Films with varied themes from different cultures are chosen to appeal to audiences in age-appropriate groupings and are shown free of charge. Nearly 9,000 children and adults have attended the festival, which has brought multigenerational family members to the campus, many for the first time. Now in its eighth year, it has created valuable partnerships and contacts with local business, community, and media organizations. This paper discusses the festival and its value in community service and as a marketing tool, and how to develop a KIDS FIRST! Film Festival at other institutions.

Introduction

In 2007, in preparation for the centennial celebration of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), the summer sessions department was charged with promoting greater community involvement with the campus. The specific goals were to

- bring diverse groups on campus,
- raise the image of the university as visitor friendly and accessible,
- provide a needed service to the community, and
- promote existing summer sessions programs and enliven the campus.

At the time, summer sessions offered over 800 credit courses with about 14,000 enrollments, almost 90% of which were at the undergraduate level. In addition, there was a small program allowing high school students to take credit courses and a community program offering performances and lectures. Missing was something to attract families, particularly those with small children, to campus.

Working within a limited budget, a committee investigated options for new programs. A staff member and former film curator suggested a festival of children's films. Such a festival is usually quite time-consuming; once programming is selected, the process of obtaining permission from filmmakers, studios, or distribution companies often necessitates negotiations and considerable expense. However, a simpler solution was found: partnering with the KIDS FIRST! Film Festival, a project of the national Coalition for Quality Children's Media.

The KIDS FIRST! Film Festival at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is now an annual summer event enthusiastically supported by the community. This paper provides information about the national KIDS FIRST! organization and the UHM festival. As well, it details what it takes to develop a KIDS FIRST! Film Festival as a summer sessions initiative and discusses the advantages, some unexpected, of doing so.

KIDS FIRST! Film Festival

*Film is very powerful—images are very powerful—and we need to teach
younger people how to use them . . . or at least how to interpret them.*

—Martin Scorsese

In today's entertainment, technology, advertising, and media environments, children are bombarded with social and commercial messages. Parents and teachers are challenged to provide children with a high degree of media literacy, ensuring that they have the tools to understand, evaluate, and critique what they view. The KIDS FIRST! Film Festival is a project of the Coalition for Quality Children's Media (<http://www.kidsfirst.org>), a national nonprofit formed in 1991 to foster critical viewing skills in children and increase the visibility and availability of quality children's media. Its mission is to engage children in becoming media-savvy viewers, users, and consumers.

The KIDS FIRST! Film Festival, dubbed the “Cannes for kids,” showcases children’s films from studios and independent filmmakers. The festival partners with over 50 member venues, including hospitals, museums, libraries, film festivals, and schools that host local festivals. An annual membership fee of \$100 gives venues access to free programming, as well as support from the knowledgeable KIDS FIRST! staff. Producers of children’s media submit programs to KIDS FIRST! for review and possible inclusion in the festival. Programs must meet the organization’s baseline criteria: they must be free of gratuitous violence or abuse; race, gender, and religious biases; inappropriate sexual content; condescension toward children; and replicable unsafe behavior.

In eight years at UHM, our KIDS FIRST! Film Festival has welcomed nearly 9,000 children and adults—and many had never been on campus before. They hail from diverse neighborhoods and are multicultural and multigenerational. With ticket prices for commercial films soaring and blockbusters becoming less character-driven and more violent, the KIDS FIRST! Film Festival offers quality edutainment in a safe, social setting that is affordable for families: it is free of charge.

The UHM KIDS FIRST! Film Festival has increased awareness of summer sessions, produced long-term relationships with the media, local organizations, and community members, and garnered a Best Noncredit Program award from the Western Association of Summer Session Administrators and a Best Community Film Series award from the national KIDS FIRST! organization.

Putting Together a Children’s Film Festival

A film curator is not required to put together a KIDS FIRST! Film Festival, but a number of processes need to be successfully executed:

- selection of films of various genres and for appropriate age groups,
- selection of appropriate dates and venues,
- allocation of resources and budget management,
- management of logistics during the festival, and
- development and management of a promotional campaign.

Finding, reviewing, and selecting age-appropriate films, plus negotiating fees for public performance rights, can be time-consuming and daunting. KIDS FIRST! offers a one-stop operation that eliminates much of the work. It provides free programming with the KIDS FIRST! “stamp of approval,” film descriptions with critiques from adults and kids, and adjunct promotional materials, including publicity photos and video clips. Partnering with KIDS FIRST! reduces research and preparation time and eliminates the intricacies of dealing with multiple distribution companies.

Selecting films can be as simple as reading the short descriptions provided on the KIDS FIRST! website, or it can involve more investigation. Preview DVDs are available by request, and short films can be viewed from a KIDS FIRST! Vimeo account. Choices may be further narrowed by visiting websites that rate children’s films, including those of the Dove Foundation and Common Sense Media. Figure 1 shows the selection for our 2013 festival.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA • OUTREACH COLLEGE

KIDS FIRST!

FILM FESTIVAL

The award-winning KIDS FIRST! Film Festival returns to Hawai'i during Summer 2013!

A project of the Coalition for Quality Children's Media, KIDS FIRST! films are free of gratuitous violence, race, gender, or religious bias, and condescension towards children.
SUPPORTED IN PART BY THE BERRY STERN MEMORIAL TRUST

SUNDAYS • JUNE 23 & 30; JULY 14 & 21
3PM • UHM Art Auditorium • FREE!

www.summer.hawaii.edu OR CALL 956-9883

JUNE 23 • AGES 4 • 21 MIN

Of Land and Sea



Sharks and Rays 20 MIN
Underwater filmmaker Annie Crawley takes you on an adventure to discover sharks and rays around the globe, including the world's first shark sanctuary in Palau.

Home Was the Sailor 4 MIN
CANADA. Painterly animated music video

Gus Outdoors: Lizard Town 30 MIN
With six-year-old naturalist Gus as host, explore the Bahamas in search of lizards, iguanas and snakes, then snorkel with creatures of the sea.

JUNE 30 • AGES 3+ • 84 MIN

Never Give Up

Left 2 MIN
When a team of robots lands on a planet for a mission, one member gets accidentally left behind.

Cores e Botas/Colors & Boots 10 MIN
BRAZIL. Joana has the same dream as all young Brazilian girls in the 80s: she wants to be a Fagundes dancer on TV. But there's a problem. Multiple award-winner. In Portuguese with subtitles.

Squeaky Business 6 MIN
A photographer enters a pet photo contest, but his dog has playtime on her mind. Best Animation, Melbourne Film Festival.

The Knightswood 12 MIN
Fantasy about a boy who puts aside his video game to venture into the forest. There his imagination comes to life with fair maidens and courageous knights.

Knights of the Playground 5 MIN
Kyle and Lilly were best friends until a princess came between them. Or was it a dragon?



How to Get to Candybar 10 MIN
Multiple award-winner from the director of Broadway's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*
A child's imagination transforms a calloused old man into a believer. Note: the word "H**T" is used.



Recipe for Love 4 MIN
Stop-motion animation about a couple who finally after seeing other couples in the kitchen. Winner, Viewfinders NBC Universal Film Challenge.



Falling Up 16 MIN
Charles discovers he has the ability to float. When pressured to fix his "problem," he finds the courage to embrace who he is. From a poem by Shel Silverstein.



King Tigermore in Strawberry Fields 4 MIN
Award-winning animation synchronized to Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G Minor. Falling asleep during a chess match, Kiri imagines the white king has come to life.





KIDS FIRST! films screen throughout the day at the Sea/Vision Theatre on **JUNE 12, 19 and 26!**
Children admitted to the Aquarium FREE with a paying adult. Download coupon at www.summer.hawaii.edu/kidfirst.

6/12: What Makes a Fish a Fish?
6/19: Dive Into Diversity
6/26: Who Lives in the Sea?

SHOWN ON ALL THREE DATES
Once Upon a Tide and Plastic Perils of the Pacific
Waikiki Aquarium events: www.waiaquarium.org

JULY 14 • AGES 3+ • 78 MIN

We Are The World

I Wish I Went to Ecuador 6 MIN
U.K. Multiple award-winning animation made by children takes you into the heart of the rainforest from a child's eye view. A terrific commentary on climate change and its devastating impacts upon our planet. —Al Gore



My Best Friend 10 MIN
SINGAPORE. A girl learns the importance of trees and asks for one for her birthday. Trouble comes when a developer buys the land where her tree is planted. Award of Excellence, International Film Festival for Environment, Health, and Culture.



JULY 21 • AGES 7+ • 18 MIN

That's Life

Do Over 8 MIN
A good first impression is key to romance. A high school sophomore veers off course and requests another chance to impress. Multiple award-winner.



Checkmate 10 MIN
INDIA. A talented boy and girl sit across from each other at a chess championship. A lot more seems to be at stake than winning the trophy. English/Subtitles.



Like Father 9 MIN
CANADA. On a stormy night, a dad just won't listen and discovers his son's fear of goblins is more real than he imagined. Multiple award-winner; narrated in iambic pentameter verse.



Man of the Match 13 MIN
INDIA. Disappointed that he has to take care of his grandfather, Sohan rediscovers his friendship with the old man while watching a cricket game. English/Subtitles.



Prayers for Peace 8 MIN
Screened internationally; winner of the prestigious Walt Disney Award in Ottawa. Stunning stop-motion animation addresses the memory of a brother killed in Iraq.



The Finish Line 26 MIN
INDIA. Named India's Best Film on Sports. An athlete and a sports journalist with a shared past learn never to let others' opinions affect life goals. English/Subtitles.



Live Outside the Box 5 MIN
Multiple award-winning animation. When a workaholic's world becomes so small there is nothing left but work, he finds the way to get his life back.



Figure 1. Summer 2013 Festival Flyer and Program

The chief curatorial concerns for a festival are film availability and quality, number and length of programs, age-appropriate groupings, and variety of themes and format. Not all films are available from KIDS FIRST! in perpetuity, and new offerings are added; the first cut will be determined by which films are available for the festival's time period.

The festival tends to show films that are unavailable in commercial theatres so they are, in effect, premieres. Organizers aim for a variety of age groups between 5 and 14 years; families with toddlers from 2 to 5 are our largest audience as there are fewer social events—and theatrical films—appropriate for them. A 60-minute program works best for preschoolers; most programs average 90 minutes. Features are shown as well as live-action, animated, and international shorts covering a variety of themes including ecology, books to film, friendship, and coming of age.

The choice of dates will depend on the local community and campus facilities. UHM chose Sunday afternoons at 3:00 p.m., avoiding Saturdays filled with a plethora of family activities and taking advantage of free campus parking on Sundays. Films are scheduled on four or five Sundays, thereby avoiding conflicts with other summer session programs. Based on the state's public schools calendar, a couple of summer break weekends are allowed to pass before starting the festival; it is completed before August. No films are shown on Sundays when our city has scheduled major children's programs. Doors open half an hour before the event, which is generally completed by 5 p.m., in time for families to discuss the films over supper.



Figure 2. A Typical Screening at the UHM Kids First! Film Festival

Venue selection will depend on available space and expected demand. Our 300-seat, on-campus venue is kid-friendly: no stairs, plastic seating, a huge white wall for a screen, and industrial carpeting providing a place for children to sit or lie on the floor in an area defined with painter's tape (see Figure 2). Additional chairs are set in the back for those with babies or strollers, for wheelchair users or elderly patrons, and for latecomers. Volunteers with flashlights positioned at exits minimize disturbance and maximize safety, making bathroom breaks, time-outs, or early departures easier.

The UHM festival operates on a budget of about \$1,200. Partnering with KIDS FIRST! eliminates the expense of rentals and fees for public performance rights. Expenses include the shipping of preview DVDs and door prizes, venue costs, printing, postage, and supplies such as tape, tickets, and balloons. Typically there are six volunteers at each screening plus an A/V attendant.

The logistics of the screenings, though not complicated, require careful planning. With small children in attendance, screenings must be well prepared to avoid confusing and potentially dangerous situations and to handle unanticipated events. First-aid kits are kept on hand and campus security are notified that there will be several hundred children and families on campus.

Our information table, laden with summer sessions promotional materials and giveaways, is a point of contact with volunteers who provide assistance. A simple box with a slot captures preprinted postcards for email addresses; pens imprinted with our web address are supplied. Volunteers blow up balloons that are affixed to directional signs and placed at strategic points on campus. They distribute door prize tickets, count attendance, and help with seating. Friendliness and accessibility are key to the festival's success and the university's brand.

Each screening opens with a recruitment pitch, asking if kids have been to college before—then encouraging them to remember, when applying to college, their outstanding experience at our university. Next is the awarding of door prizes. The KIDS FIRST! organization receives multiple DVDs for review, and it sends the surplus ones to festivals for use as door prizes. Children are given tickets upon arrival, winners come up to receive their DVD prizes to audience applause, and a photo is taken. Parents sign a release form so that images can be used in future promotions and marketing.

Promotional and Partnership Advantages

The media are very amenable to promoting free summer family events, sometimes devoting a news-show segment or features section to these programs. To take advantage of these promotional opportunities, you need to

- know deadlines for special issues and programs,
- prepare promotional materials, including press releases, flyers, high-resolution images, and film and audio clips,

- mail and email a flyer, along with press releases and multiple images, to print media feature and calendar editors, reporters who have kids or are interested in film, and those who cover subjects related to a screening (such as science reporters when the festival includes a science film), and
- follow up with another press release and images as the festival progresses.

Newspapers may have a Saturday children's section or a TGIF magazine and may include a photo or mention of the festival from week to week beyond an initial article. UHM has had success with early-morning TV news shows, with in-studio interviews and "sneak peeks" with film clips supplied by KIDS FIRST! Flyers are also sent by direct mail or email PDF to

- public and private schools,
- military bases,
- public library branches,
- community organizations for inclusion in newsletters or websites,
- web calendars and social media sites, and
- university departments and media services.

Partnerships were an unintended and welcomed outgrowth of the festival's success and high visibility. The director of public relations for Starwood Hotels & Resorts, who had enjoyed the festival with her niece, approached UHM to host poolside movies, which featured a screening with a young actress who introduced her film and signed autographs. Hotel guests were invited via the in-house video channel and concierge desk. Local residents were offered free parking and the hotel offered door prizes, including vacation packages and restaurant meals. Local TV covered the event.

Other partnerships included screenings at the city aquarium during World Oceans Month, with discounts for children for a day at the facility. In a collaboration with our university Women's Center, the Girl Scouts of Hawai'i, and the State Commission on the Status of Women, a festival was offered for girls during Women's History Month. With university departments and public and private organizations, Hawai'i Clean Energy Day was promoted with screenings of environmental films for children. When Hawai'i hosted the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, a series of films entitled "Families of the World" was screened in conjunction with a broader Asia-Pacific summer sessions program of lectures, classes, and workshops.

Although partnerships bring added logistics, meetings, and personalities, they allow you to share expenses, generate more press, and broadcast your brand to new audiences who may be unfamiliar with your programs. Partnerships can also lead to programs beyond the film festival.

Conclusion

With a minimal investment of funds and a group of happy volunteers, our kids' film festival quickly attained our community outreach goals of bringing family groups on campus and raising

the campus's image as an active member of the community. In addition, the festival continues to reap many unplanned benefits: it introduces children to media literacy and encourages conversations between parents and children; it generates new partnerships for our college, lots of free advertising for summer sessions, and plenty of happy faces. UHM encourages other schools with summer sessions to start their own festivals. Partnering with KIDS FIRST! offers a low-investment, low-risk approach to doing so.

Biographies

William Chismar is dean of Outreach College at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, which includes summer sessions, continuing education, and international programs. He is also a professor of information technology management in the UHM Shidler College of Business.

Ann Brandman, curator of the UHM KIDS FIRST! Film Festival, is a communications specialist with Outreach College. She has previously served as a film and video curator for Honolulu's two major art museums.