

# VARIETY

2011 Toronto International Film Festival

## Toronto market's for mavens! Sellers must know distrib landscape!

By [Dave McNary](#)

Pics, such as "Burning Man," have to be cleverly shopped these days. With the Toronto Film Festival kicking into high gear, sellers are operating amid much trickier turf than in recent years.

"Knowledge of the buyers is the new game," notes Andy Paterson, producer of Aussie drama "Burning Man," which had its world premiere Saturday night at the festival. Paterson first approached festival programmers in April with "Burning Man," centered on an English chef, portrayed by Matthew Goode, who's dealing with complicated family issues. He'd hoped a TIFF slot would create the right amount of buzz for a sale once the pic, for which CAA is repping domestic rights, was screened. "Five months later, you know a lot of work has gone into getting it ready," he said. But just because many new buyers also represent new distribution platforms doesn't mean they're ingenues, Paterson said. "So my task as a producer is to deliver films to the market that it doesn't know yet that it wants," Paterson added. "It has to be about something that moviegoers haven't seen before -- so essentially, you're creating a completely new brand for the buyer."

At first glance, it would seem that sellers have the upper hand, with the presence of new buyers -- Open Road, Relativity, FilmDistrict, CBS Films -- along with the usual array of buyers such as Fox Searchlight, the Weinstein Co., Focus, Sony Pictures Classics, Lionsgate and Summit here at the fest. Mix in new avenues of exploitation via digital and the picture becomes more complicated for sellers. The Weinstein Co. announced a push into the digital space two days before the festival started: Tom Quinn and Jason Janego will create a new TWC label to bring new films and other specialty entertainment to audiences simultaneously across multiple digital and traditional platforms. "It's part-and-parcel for sellers to be in the digital realm, which is changing by the hour," notes veteran exec Mark Gill, who spent many years with the Weinsteins at Miramax and was recently installed as president of Millennium Films. "If you're selling, it requires much more study of who wants what," he notes. "There's so much stratification among the buyers, so figuring out what each of them wants can be elusive since everyone has their niche. There's really no such thing as a film that can cross over to all the buyers." Kevin Kasha, exec VP of worldwide acquisitions and co-productions for Anchor Bay Entertainment, agrees. Anchor Bay, which has handled 70 titles in three years, believes that sellers are facing a far more complex task. "The business used to be about making a dollar, and now it's about making 10 dimes because of all forms of digital platforms," Kasha notes. "It used to be, 'Do we like the film or don't we like it?' Now we have to know who is it for." Anchor Bay made a first-day buy of the U.S. rights to "Thirteen," Gela Babluani's remake of his 2005 thriller "13 Tzemeti." Stars include Sam Riley, Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson, Ray Winstone, Alexander Skarsgard, Michael Shannon, Ben Gazzara, Emmanuelle Chriqui, Mickey Rourke and Jason Statham. "I like to think that we're prudently aggressive since you have to be careful about what we call festival helium -- which means getting itchy fingers as a buyer," Kasha said. "You have to be ready for phone calls from buyers at 3 a.m. asking, 'Are you in or are you out?'"

Bill Bromley, chief acquisitions officer for Image Entertainment, has reduced his buying in recent years as his label has scaled back releases to focus on more recognizable titles. "I hate to say this, but it's easy to pass on something that does not work on paper," he notes. "Sellers are more educated and coming in better prepared, but they're still wanting to be told what's going on while we're looking for very specific films that have to have a primary home. Negotiations are far more complicated for several reasons -- because we're competing with the studios, filmmakers still want to get a theatrical release and exhibitors still want a window before the VOD release."

On the second day of TIFF, Image acquired U.S. rights to football drama "All Things Fall Apart," starring Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson. Alex Walton, prexy of international sales and distribution at Exclusive Films, notes, "Like last year, no one knew -- it wasn't expected to be as lively you've got a lot of U.S. indies who have had a great start."