



The Pros and Cons of International Co-Production

By Vanessa Frank | 23-Apr-2019



International co-production can be a powerful tool for closing the gap in the funding of your independent film production. International co-production is, in essence, when production companies from two or more countries unite to work on a single production. By doing so they share costs, mitigate risk, and most importantly, create a basis for the production to access incentive funds in multiple territories.

In essence, there are numerous countries that have bilateral treaties that enable filmmakers to collaborate internationally, and as a result access government financial assistance, tax [concessions](#), and in-kind resources in both countries. It's not uncommon for well structured international co-productions

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to see more than 50% of their budget come from soft money!

These official co-productions also provide the extra benefit of opening up domestic market share in two countries rather than one, as co-productions are often seen as being from both nations due to nationally recognized cast. Hence, the local market is more susceptible to being interested in a film's release. As a result, this can be a much stronger proposition for pre-sales.

However, there are drawbacks. For one, filming in two different countries typically increases the costs of co-ordination, filming, and dealing with the government.

Because of these increased costs, international co-production can be a better fit for independent films that are the higher end of the budget spectrum, as that extra cost will represent a smaller percentage of the budget than it would for a low budget film.

And with both domestic and international co-production [deals](#) there is always the risk of loss of control. Though deals can vary, the general dynamic is that if you have two different sets of producers, there is far more likelihood of strong differences of opinion and/or power struggles. In a situation where there is a unity of vision, this delicate relationship can be carefully navigated. But if there is a difference of vision, or big egos involved, this can become quite stressful, for all concerned.

And be aware that if you transfer the copyright to a co-producer, you no longer have ownership of the film. Which means, amongst other things, that from a [legal](#) standpoint you will no longer have creative control. So you need to be very clear on expectations in this area before proceeding!

International co-production, when done right, can be a great way of creating value for your project, and mitigating risk. However, it does require a high degree of competence as a producer, a thorough understanding of the culture and film industry standards of the foreign country that you will be filming in, and an excellent relationship with the co-producer, in which roles are clearly defined and agreed upon.

Vanessa Frank is the presenter of [Film Funding from A-Z](#), an on-demand course which teaches [film finance](#) to independent filmmakers.

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