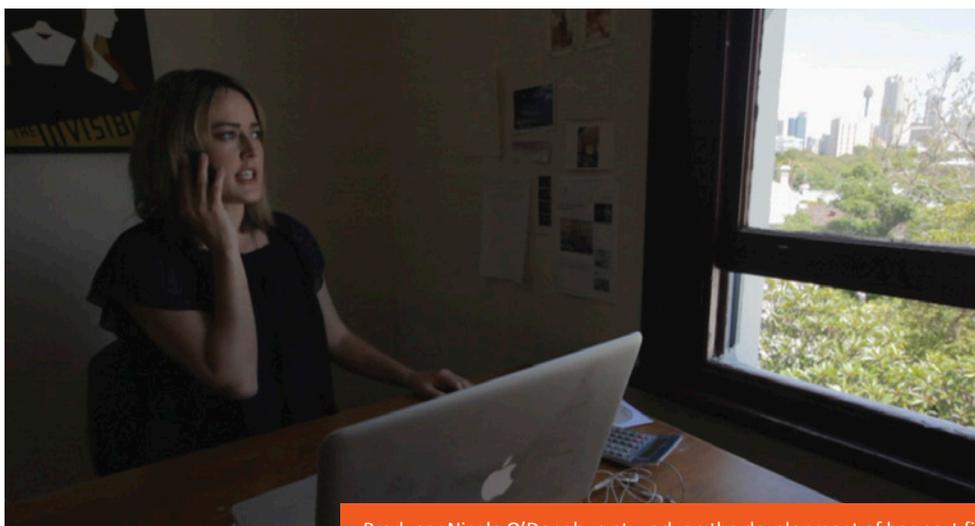


What is a producer?



Producer Nicole O'Donohue at work on the development of her next film

Are you passionate about movies? A creative thinker? Financially savvy and a good deal-maker? A terrific leader? If so, you'd probably make a pretty good producer.

There's a reason that, when films win the award for Best Picture, it's the producers who receive that award rather than the director. And there's a reason that the public, who often know the names of directors - like James Cameron, Peter Jackson or Baz Luhrmann - seldom recognise the names of producers - like Jon Landau, Carolyne Cunningham or Catherine Knapman. Producing a film isn't a job for someone looking for the spotlight - that's usually focused on the director and the stars of the movie.

The job of a producer starts years before the audience sees the movie and continues for years after the film has been completed. A team comes together to write, cast, develop and finance the film. As producer Rosemary Blight (*Clubland*, *The Sapphires*) notes: "The roles are relatively simple at this early stage: the writer writes, the director thinks about cast and supports the writer, and the producer, ever the optimist, flies around the world trying to find money and friends for the film. Once the film is funded, the pressure is on the director, and the producer is forced to take a step back. The director's job is to encourage the cast and crew to excel beyond expectations, and it's a producer's job to create

an environment that allows the director to reach beyond himself or herself to create a great work."

It's the producer's job to deliver the film on time and on budget to the investors - particularly to the distribution company who are going to secure a cinema release and promote the film. And not just any film, but the great film that was promised when they were developing the script.

Producers usually have great organisational skills, an understanding of finance and excellent interpersonal qualities, often describing themselves as a mix between a drill sergeant, banker and psychiatrist.

During development and pre-production, the producer oversees the process required to get the movie into production. This involves:

- Locking in the contracts required to secure the rights to the script, the finance for the film, the best possible director and lead actors.
- Consulting with the director, hiring the heads of department, such as the director of photography, first assistant director, production designer and editor who give creative input to the director.
- The producer and director jointly choose the key cast for the movie, usually with input from the distributor and sales agent.

- As development proceeds, the producer monitors key decisions including the schedule, locations, actors, sets and costumes, deferring to and encouraging the director's creative vision within the available funds.

During the shoot, the producer works hard behind the scenes. Producers usually know every crew and cast member by name, and have an especially close relationship with the production office team, which includes the production manager, production accountant, production coordinator, production secretary, runners and location manager.

The producer usually spends a good third of each day on set, watching the shoot, listening to concerns that may arise and encouraging fine work from all the cast and crew.

Off set, the producer reviews dailies to ensure the shots will assemble logically into the scripted scene, that the performances are effective, and that the technical standards are being maintained.

Back in the production office, the producer consults daily with the production manager and the production accountant to refine the budget and allocate resources, which might include people, equipment, material, facilities and time.

The producer has lots of daily tasks that most of the crew hardly see. They liaise with investors, distributor and sales agent, arranging stills and the electronic press kit, approving upcoming sets and costumes, refining post-production detail, keeping the lead cast happy and planning the wrap party and the t-shirts.

Sometimes troubleshooting is needed – encourage a nervous cast member, counsel a junior crew member whose work isn't up to scratch, reassure a location owner that their property won't be damaged. And if it is, deal with insurance claims. They do all of this and are a sounding board for the ideas of the director.

During post-production, the producer performs a number of tasks, including finalising all the details from the shoot, keeping the budget and schedule on track and planning the publicity strategy with the distributor.

The producer is still creatively responsible for the delivery of the film and views intermittent cuts with the director and editor, suggesting necessary changes. The producer oversees the full range of post-production elements: visual effects, colour grading, title sequence and end credits, music, sound mix and the soundtrack.

During the final stages of post-production, the producer assembles and delivers the mountain of documentation required by investors, distributor and sales agent.

Even when the film has been delivered, the work of the producer continues as they liaise with the distributor about the film's release and monitor the financial returns as they start to come in from ancillary sales: airlines, TV networks or hotels. Incoming revenue then must be allocated to the investors on the terms agreed in the production contracts.

This period can often appear to be the glamorous part of the filmmaking process: there are film premieres to show up to, festival screenings and awards ceremonies (hopefully) to attend. But these events can also be hard work as the producer tries to raise the profile of the film and get the attention of potential cinema-going audiences. The producer by this stage is often trying to find finance for the next film, currently in development.

The work of a producer on a single film never actually ends as they continue to service the film, even if there is little income from it. They distribute any income, including DVD sales and video on demand, to the investors and provide them with reports on the film's earnings. They give access to the masters when cast and crew need to make show reels of their work or when asked for footage by the media. They also deal with requests from students, researchers, obscure festivals honouring the director...anyone who is interested in the film.

Despite the myth of overpaid producers, the reality is quite different. For their hard work, they receive a pre-determined fee - a small percentage of the total budget. They might also have a share of profit when and if the movie goes into profit. It's definitely one of the toughest jobs in the industry.

[Click here to view interview with producer Nicole O'Donohue](#)

Useful resources:

- [Responsibilities of a movie producer](#)
- [Rambling On... with Producers: What Does a Producer Actually do?](#)
- [What does a Hollywood producer do, exactly?](#)
- [Creative Skillset: Producer](#)
- [It's less glamorous than directing, but film producing can be the reel deal](#)

Creative Content Australia is a not-for-profit organisation committed to raising awareness of the significance of copyright, the value of screen content and the impact that downloading and streaming pirated films and TV programs has on the creative industries: www.creativecontentaustralia.org.au

Creative Content Australia develops and distributes free online education resources to schools throughout Australia to stimulate classroom discussion about copyright and promote the value of creative content and good digital citizenship online www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info

