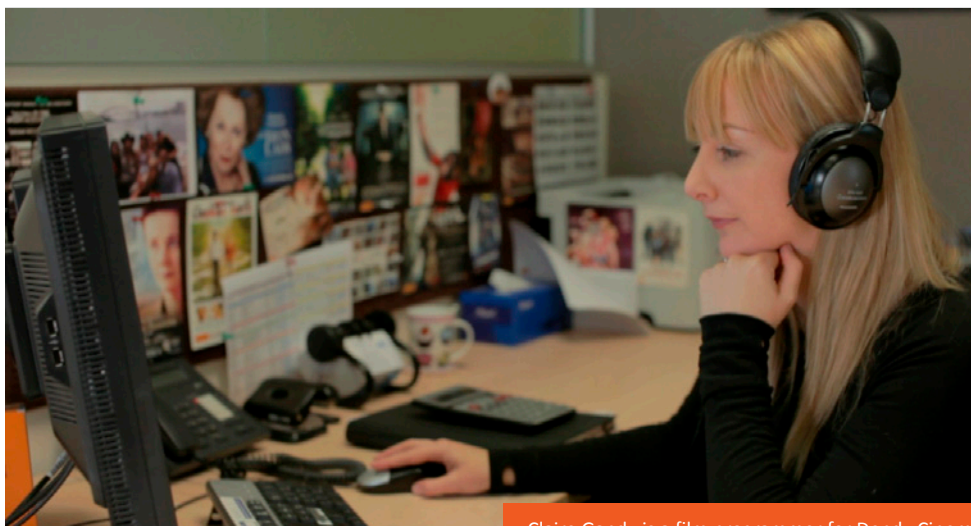


## What is a film programmer?



Claire Gandy is a film programmer for Dendy Cinemas

A film programmer is responsible for choosing which films play, and how often they are shown, in their cinemas. Film programmers may work for a single cinema or an entire chain.

Many factors inform this decision-making process, including:

- what films are on offer from distributors and at what terms
- the running times of films
- how films are performing at a cinema location
- the particular tastes of audiences at a specific location.

Most film programmers will tell you that the best part of their job is watching hundreds of movies every year to decide which ones will screen in their cinema, based on which they think will most appeal to their cinema audiences.

The film programmer regards the cinema week as Thursday to Wednesday. New films open on a Thursday and generally, their first weekend box office is extremely important as it will dictate the film's sessions for the following week. Sometimes in this cut-throat business, if a film can't find a sizeable audience on its opening weekend, its sessions are cut dramatically.

Monday is programming day, when film programmers consider weekend figures and arrange their schedule based on what is working best for their locations.

The film programmer has one of the most important roles in exhibition, as the activities of nearly all exhibition staff are influenced by the weekly program.

Best not to phone a film programmer or sales staffer from a distribution company on a Monday unless your question is very important as their focus is the following week's program. Sometimes the distributors might be lobbying the film programmers not to reduce sessions on a particular film, or the film programmer may be seeking to reduce sessions for a film which has performed extremely poorly.

The film programmer may move some films into smaller cinemas to accommodate new openers. They usually do their programming using a grid so they can keep track of all their cinemas – some use a matrix template and program by hand and some have computer templates that help them keep track of all their films and locations.

In addition to telling distributors what changes they intend to make to the previous week's sessions of their films, the film programmer has to provide various different departments within their own organisation with the final program for the coming week so they can do their own jobs. The technical staff, who manage the actual screenings, need to know what to screen when, ensure they have the appropriate KDMs (digital keys) lined up and the film programmer also lets them know what trailers should be playing with which films.

The advertising department needs to have the final program so they can ensure the correct information appears in directory and display ads and the website managers need the program for the same reason.

The front-of-house staff need the coming week's program too - so the ticket sellers can ensure they are selling tickets for the correct films at the designated times and the ushers can be certain that the right film is playing at any given session. They may need to alter the marquee outside the cinema to take off any reference to films that are finishing and add any new openers. Likewise, display staff need the program so they can plan new displays or make arrangements to take down displays for films that are no longer playing.

Marketing staff need the weekly program so they know what messages to send to their loyalty program customers, or include in their weekly newsletters or social media posts.

In some single screen or twin cinemas, the film programmer may need to multitask and fulfil other roles, such as managing the cinema, booking and designing advertising, running the technical side of the screenings, changing the marquee or managing displays.

Over the past several years, cinemas have been converting to digital and 3D as the old 35mm prints are phased out. This has involved enormous investment and effort by exhibitors so that patrons can enjoy the best possible in-cinema experience. Film programmers have been very involved in that process as they need to fully understand the capabilities of their location or circuit so they can program optimally.

Many film programmers look beyond films to round out their programs and offer diversity to their patrons by staging live concerts or screening 'alternate content', which includes theatre productions, opera, ballet and sporting events, sometimes beamed in from overseas via satellite.

Being a film programmer can be a very busy job, as they spend a great deal of time watching movies to consider whether they will screen them and are sometimes invited on set visits while films are in production.

Film programmers attend movie conventions in Australia and sometimes overseas to see upcoming product and network with industry colleagues.

[Click here to view interview with film programmer Claire Gandy](#)



Film programmers spend a lot of time watching movies to consider whether they will program them

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](http://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](http://www.nothingbeatstherealthing.info)

