

CINEMA FOR ALL STARTER PACK 2015

Equipment can be an expensive and overwhelming element of showing films in your local community. However, in order to ensure audience satisfaction and consistency of projection it's important to have reliable equipment that will screen films to a cinematic standard. Whether you are high or low on funds there are some items you should always make sure you have.

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

When showing films in a community cinema or film society, there are 6 essential pieces of equipment you will need:

PROJECTOR: Most projectors are now digital. Almost all projectors can work in most circumstances, however if operating in a particularly bright environment a higher brightness level (lumens) can help.

PLAYER: Sometimes referred to as film transport. Most community cinemas and film societies currently use a DVD/Blu-ray player or use a computer. Some groups are able to screen using 35mm or have upgraded to DCP projection, however this can be very expensive if your venue doesn't already have these facilities.

SCREEN: In more permanent venues this can be mounted. Screens average in size between 12' and 16' (measured diagonally). Standard screens are usually white, but you can also get glass and silvered. Silvered screens are required for most 3D systems.

SOUND SYSTEM: A sound system contains a processor and an amplifier. In many cases these will be combined and most venues are likely to have a sound system in place, however if not many home cinema processors are sufficient for small venues.

SPEAKERS: A 3 speaker set-up - a centre speaker and identical left and right speakers – is usually fine for most venues. Larger venues may require more, or you may wish to consider surround sound if you plan to show a lot of action films or films with a lot of sound effects. Speakers used for music/discos are usually just as appropriate for film screenings, however, be wary of mini speakers and speakers designed for home cinemas.

CABLES: You will need cables for power, video, audio and network. When budgeting, remember to bear in mind that good cables will cost around 10% of the overall cost of equipment, and are essential. It's also important to think about the distance between your equipment and that the longer cables are the more difficult they are to manage. Don't forget to label both ends of a cable, as it might not always be the same person setting up. If there is quite a lot of cables running through the venue having thicker, well insulated

HOLDING A TEST SCREENING

Before purchasing equipment you should always ask if the seller will allow you to hold a test screening. Most manufacturers will allow a test screening upon receipt of a deposit. In some regions of the UK Cinema For All has equipment that may be borrowed for a test screening, but in many areas it may also be possible to borrow from a neighbouring film society.

cables can reduce interference.

VENUE CONSIDERATIONS

Temporary or Permanent Venue?

When purchasing equipment it's important to first consider the environment you're screening in. Have you secured a venue you'll regularly be using? Do you plan on transporting equipment from venue to venue?

PERMANENT VENUE

PERMISSION: Do you own the venue or is it hired? If it's a hired venue then you will need to consider whether you can get permission to store equipment there – if not it will need to be easily lift-able. Can you get permission to make permanent alterations to the building such as ceiling and wall mountings for projectors and screens or installing cables? It's also important to think about what other functions the venue regularly holds - are there any events that a permanent screen or the running of cables would obstruct? Are there any regular activities in the venue that might run the risk of equipment getting damaged?

PROJECTOR MOUNTING: For the best quality the ideal place for a projector is in the middle of the audience at head height; however this can be disruptive. Additionally, projectors at head height or below will cast a shadow on the screen. A good way around this is to have the projector ceiling mounted. If more convenient this can be mounted at the back of the hall, however you will need to make sure your projector has a long throw lens.

SCREEN MOUNTING: Screens can either be wall mounted, dropdown or roll-up. If you are on a very tight budget, you may consider painting a screen on the wall, however you will need to make sure you use highly reflective acrylic paint manufactured especially for this purpose.

CABLES: Where are you going to run the cables? Where will the projectionist be in relation to the power sockets and speakers? Cables can be run along walls and under carpets, but it's important to bear in mind health and safety at all times. If you have the budget and a permanent venue you may wish to have them professionally installed. Those on a tighter budget may be able to save money with a bit of DIY and the help of someone handy with a soldering iron.

TEMPORARY VENUE

SCREEN: For temporary venues or mobile/pop-up community cinemas, fast-fold screens are a great option, as they can be easily assembled and disassembled by one person. However, be wary of tripod screens as although these are cheaper they can easily twist and are generally found to be unreliable.

SPEAKERS: A subwoofer is usually very heavy so might not be possible unless the venue itself actually has one. However, subwoofers are used for more bass sounds (as in films with a lot of explosions or special effects), so it may not be necessary for your screenings anyway. Soundbars/columns are becoming more popular and portable - however it does tend to be the case that only the top-end products are good enough for larger venues.

CASES: When transporting equipment good quality casing is invaluable. Always make room for it in your budget and don't forget that cables need casing too.

MAKING YOUR VENUE CINEMATIC

As important as it is to have the right equipment for your venue, there are several other things you can do to improve your cinema set up. Often factors such as venue lighting, running schedules and audience comfort can have a huge impact on the success of your screenings. As much as a high quality projection might draw in an audience, a great atmosphere is something that everyone will value.

LIGHTING: It's always handy if you can have lights you can adjust yourself. Ideally there would be a light on the screen and a light on the audience when the audience are coming in and being seated. If the area around the screen is as dark as possible this avoids distraction and encourages spectator immersion.

RUNNING SCHEDULE: A running schedule generally encourages the smooth running of a screening. Making a list of when lights come on and off, the order of pre-film material, any announcements and film markers (such as beginning, middle and end) will help you keep on top of things. Walkie-talkies can be a really great (and really fun) way of keeping open lines of communication between front of house and people orchestrating the projection.

PROPER PRESENTATION: If possible try not to show the DVD menu on the screen before a film. This can be avoided by either using the projector's blanking function, the player's pause function or even just putting a piece of cardboard in front of the projector before starting the film. If showing pre-film material it may even be a good idea to invest in a computer so you can switch between sources.

COMFORT: Something so easy to forget but something so important. Are the toilets easy to find? Is it easy to navigate your way out of a dark screening to find them? Are they at the back of the hall so to minimise disruption? Is there a kitchen? Is there any food and drink available at your screening? Are the seats comfortable? Is the venue accessible to all? Audiences are willing to forgive technical blips, but may not return if they've had an uncomfortable evening.

REMEMBER...

- Your venue should be your guiding point for what equipment you use - a permanent venue and a temporary venue will call for different types of equipment.
- Where possible try and arrange a test-screening to see what equipment works best in your venue.
- Keeping the right tools with you will ensure that you are prepared for any number of incidents and situations that might arise.
- High quality equipment isn't all that matters - pay attention to your audiences' needs.

HANDY EXTRAS

As well as your basic equipment there are several things that are always a good idea to have on hand when screening a film:

- Gaffa tape
- Spare projector bulb
- Fuses
- Kettle leads, figure 8 power cable and an extension lead
- 3 phono/ RCA cables
- Craft knife
- Air in a can/ airblower (to quickly clean dust)
- Spare batteries for remotes

For bespoke advice, get in touch with Cinema For All on 0114 2210314 or email info@cinemaforall.org.uk