

HOW A MOVIE GETS MADE

STUDIO PATH vs INDIE PATH

by Jack Snyder for St. Louis Filmworks

1 STORY and RIGHTS

Studio: The studio may buy or option the rights to a screenplay or book, etc., or hire writers to develop the idea, and the rights usually stay with the studio.

Indie: Producer secures rights (option/purchase) and controls chain of title early.

2 LOGLINE and TREATMENT

Studio: Used to sell the concept internally and to talent; many approvals.

Indie: Used to pitch investors, sales agents, and attach talent fast.

3 SCREENPLAY

Studio: Multiple drafts with studio exec notes; writers may be replaced.

Indie: Drafts aimed at “shootable” clarity; often written to a target budget.

4 DEVELOPMENT

Studio: Packaging discussions begin; studio shapes tone, audience, and budget level.

Indie: Producer shapes the plan: budget, schedule, locations, incentives, and feasibility.

5 TURNAROUND

Studio: If the studio won't proceed, rights may be released/sold so it can be set up elsewhere (often with repayment terms).

Indie: Less common -- indies usually control rights, but can re-package or move to a new financier/buyer.

6 PACKAGING (Director/Cast/Producers)

Studio: Attachments help secure an internal greenlight; studio may dictate choices.

Indie: Packaging is the engine -- attach bankable elements to unlock financing and distribution interest.

7 BUDGET and SCHEDULE

Studio: Budgeting done with studio oversight; schedule built around talent availability.

Indie: Budget/schedule built to be lean; designed around what you can truly afford and execute.

8 FINANCING / GREENLIGHT

Studio: Greenlight is internal approval; funding and distribution are typically built-in.

Indie: Money is assembled [equity (financing through investors), incentives (tax, in-kind support, etc.), debt financing (an MG for a particular actor) pre-sales, gap financing (loan against unsold distribution rights)]; “greenlight” happens when the plan is fully financed.

9 LEGAL and BUSINESS SETUP

Studio: Studio legal handles contracts, clearances, insurance, deliverables requirements.

Indie: Producer sets up the LLC and investor docs (PPM, operating agreement, subscription agreement), secures chain of title, handles contracts, and puts insurance in place (including E&O) -- everything must be investor/distributor ready.

10 PRE-PRODUCTION

Studio: Full department staffing; studio resources, longer runway.

Indie: Small team efficiency; prep is where you save the movie (and the money).

11 PRODUCTION (SHOOT)

Studio: More time/resources; tighter union complexity; higher oversight.

Indie: Fewer days, fewer company moves; must protect performance and coverage. May be completely non-union or a mix of union (SAG) and non-union (Crew).

12 POST-PRODUCTION

Studio: Larger post budgets; studio notes and test screenings can drive changes.

Indie: Post is strategic -- finish strong, hit deliverables, don't outspend your plan.

13 SALES / FESTIVALS / BUYER STRATEGY

Studio: Often not festival-dependent; release strategy set early with marketing partners.

Indie: Often crucial -- festivals, sales agents, and market timing can make or break distribution.

14 MARKETING

Studio: Studio marketing machine: trailers, PR, media buys, wide awareness.

Indie: Targeted marketing: strong key art/trailer, plus smart PR, and social/community building.

15 DISTRIBUTION

Studio: Theatrical and/or major streaming via studio channels; global rollout possible.

Indie: Release is typically rolled out in stages: festivals, event screenings, distributors, limited theatrical, a streamer deal (TVOD -- pay to rent or buy, SVOD -- subscription service, or TV/cable, then AVOD -- free with ads).

IMPORTANT NOTE:

STUDIOS are approvals-driven (greenlight is the gate). **INDIES** are packaging/financing-driven (money is the gate).

