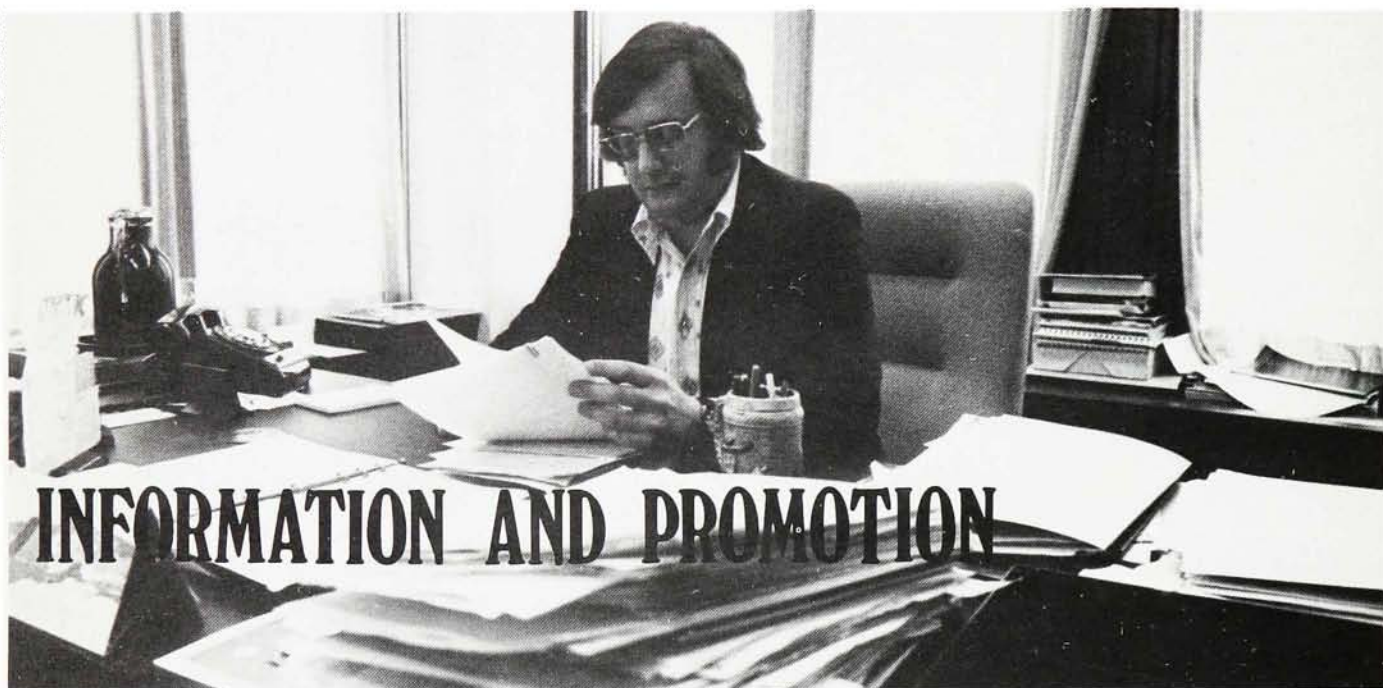




DAVID NOVEK

Stephen Chesley

Photo: Baltazar



If the main purpose of the Film Board is to communicate, and film is the means of communication, there is one further step to be considered, and it concerns communication too: telling the audience about the films. That job is up to the Information and Promotion Division, under director David Novek.

There's more, however, to this section than the title implies, as Novek points out. "We're responsible for information and promotion, but we also look after matters such as festival representation and public relations. The information section, under Ron Jones, looks after dealing with the press — press relations, press conferences, launching films. Then there is the promotion section under Robert Cardinal, which looks after printed material, displays, exhibits, posters and advertising. Françoise Joubert heads up the festival section — she's a recognized film authority and travels not only from the Film Board but also on her own as a jury member or delegate very often — and is responsible for our participation at festivals. Finally there's two people to look after public relations — tours of the building, setting up special screenings. I get involved personally in some of this activity, such as the setting up of the Board of Governors meeting in Toronto this spring and the reception with it."

Thirty people, including freelancers and secretaries, deal with an annual production of 140 films (this year over 170 films because of the addition of the language series) and a catalogue of one thousand current titles. The division is responsible for all printed matter except books put out by the still photo division in Ottawa. "And there is other activity where the people concerned are responsible and we help out — the technical newsletter, *Challenge for Change*, *Potpourri* from the Toronto office.

Two major annual projects are the Catalogue and the Annual Report. In addition, when Canada began its Cannes push, Novek's department assumed the job of preparing the

promotional material. All of the festival work was added two years ago.

What the information and promotion consists of is not uniform. "Some films don't get press releases. Actually we have no centralized mailing list, except for a press list. Each office has its own list for promotion in that region. There's no direct head office supervision — they're responsible.

"Every film has an information sheet about it, which comes out when it goes into community distribution and is made available for libraries and lending. There's no mailing list for these sheets, they go out to the individual offices, and they decide who should get them, based on potential interest.

"If we sent one of these to every newspaper, we'd be wearing out our welcome."

Novek is very conscious of that welcome, and he explains that the Board doesn't simply promote every picture released. There are priorities. "If a film is going into theatres, we have to promote it. Or on TV, of course. We must alert the mass audience. Special series, such as *Corporation*, receive special promotion. Another priority is if the film has a special and specific community interest. For example, we're promoting *A Votre Santé*, a two-hour film about a hospital emergency ward, to the medical profession. And of course if a film is involved in a festival such as Cannes or Berlin, it receives promotion, because the film has a particular merit.

"If a film has a limited distribution area, such as Quebec, we don't promote it outside. The only exception to the general guidelines for choosing is the *Challenge for Change*. They don't like a lot of publicity, but prefer working in the groups."

All of this activity costs money, of course, but Novek, unlike most government employees and certainly everyone in the film industry, feels that his budget is adequate. "We could always use more, of course, so that we could promote more

films. But you can't compare our situation to the private sector which has a real problem. They should figure it as a cost of production. When we're setting up the Cannes material, they're always scrounging, and they're still scrounging at release time. Look at **Duddy Kravitz**, the public was waiting for that film. You can't just make films, you have to sell them too."

Selling them means launching them properly, Novek feels. "Promotion can only bring people to the theatre the first week or two. After that it's up to the public. Eventually what makes a film is word of mouth, and word gets around pretty fast.

"An adequate budget to release a movie in Toronto or Montreal is twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars. That's for creation of material, a purchase of twelve thousand dollars worth of ad space and air time, press conferences and screenings, all for a two or three week launch. The money comes from the distributor and the theatre chain, as well as the producer.

"Even after all of this activity you can't tell about success. **Le Temps d'une Chasse** was launched in Montreal and when it came to Toronto we spent five thousand dollars. Nobody went. Nobody went in Quebec either, it ran only three weeks in Montreal. If it had made money, it would have kept running.

"O.K. **Laliberté** got great reviews, coverage, and it didn't take off. I don't know why. Why didn't **Kamouraska** make it? You can have a fine film that isn't a great box office attraction."

Film Board participation in openings and promotion for features is on a more active level than most producer's, especially since the Board doesn't also act as distributor. "We're the only organization in Canada with an ongoing staff and continuity, so we handle the press conferences, photo coverage. We make the trailer and the commercials. The distributor gets involved on the advertising side - he has to sell it. He's bought it from us, so he should have a say. Our artists and writers work, but the distributor has an input.

"Buying space and time is a collaboration. They put in money and we can add to it. We can say 'Let's do something extra.' It depends. Basically it's their responsibility. They give us an advance against distribution and we can turn that money back into promotion, but in the end it's up to them. It's a distributor's job to release the film."

Novek sits back in his chair, the ever-present cigar giving the impression that you're talking to a Hollywood veteran. Novek is tall and makes his presence felt, in a quiet and friendly way. He's a pro, and after years of sort of making films and putting them in distribution and then forgetting to tell anyone that they exist, it's good to see the Board achieving not only a recognition of the necessity of publicity, but even a sophistication in the execution of it, due in no small part, one suspects, to the presence of Novek. He has been at the Board since 1969.

"I was a reporter for the *Montreal Herald* until 1957, then a radio editor and Bell Canada public relations person. From 1963 to 1968 I was editor and publisher of the *Jewish Chronicle Review*, but I left that. The Film Board had an ad in the paper that I answered, but even though they liked me they said they would rather promote someone from within. I took another job and two weeks later they called me and I left it.

"I was one of the Canadians who knew about the Film Board," he laughed, "and I liked film."

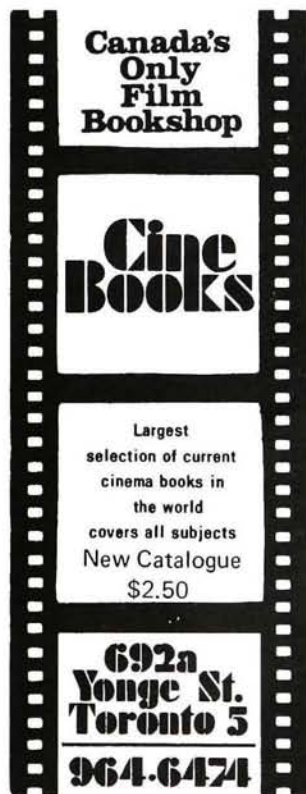
Of course there's also the other side of communication: the feedback. And the Board has a very active audience. But the feedback doesn't necessarily come back to headquarters, says Novek. "The National Film Board is situated where the people are, that is, if they know there is an office in Winnipeg they'll send their comments there. The office may send them directly to the filmmakers. Letters to the Board, TV response, they go to my office, and we channel them right through to the filmmakers."

At the Board, the communication travels from idea to production to release to feedback; the complete journey. ●



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