

ALLFOREIGNFILMS.COM: A CASE STUDY
IN MULTIMEDIA RESEARCH

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Abstract

The Internet is a great resource for finding movie information. Fans can choose among dozens of film web sites to read movie reviews, rate films and share their thoughts on movie-oriented message boards. However, most of these web sites have an American film focus. This thesis therefore proposes a design for a comprehensive foreign film web site named AllForeignFilms.com. Specifically, the thesis argues that there is a U.S. foreign film market that justifies the creation of an all-foreign film site. It also discusses the site's design and functionality based on audience research and competitive analysis. Finally, the thesis proposes a marketing strategy and possible ways to maintain the site's economic viability.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Scott Pao and June Chen,
my grandparents, and everyone who helped me along the way.

Many thanks,
William

Project Description

This thesis includes a CD-ROM containing files associated with the prototype of AllForeignFilms.com, which also resides on the World Wide Web:

<http://www.williampao.com/foreignfilms>. These files – in .htm, .jpg, and .gif formats – are supported by both the most-used web browsers, Internet Explorer and Netscape. All URLs are relative so that the user can access each page on the site without Internet connection.

The prototype of the site has nine available pages: index.htm, searchpage.htm, searchresults.htm, movie.htm, clip.htm, messageboards1.htm, messageboards2.htm, messageboards3.htm and messageboards4.htm. These pages are designed to let the user experience the site’s “look and feel.” Unless specified below, the links on the site are not functional.

The user should start with index.htm, which is the site’s home page. He should then click on the right shoulder art (the one with *Life Is Beautiful* characters in the center), which takes him to the search page, searchpage.htm. After clicking on the “search” button, the user is taken to a results page, searchresults.htm. He should then click on the *Farewell My Concubine* link, which takes him to the dedicated movie page, movie.htm. On that page, the user can click on the thumbnail image immediately to the right of the left navigation bar. The file clip.htm then shows up in a popup window,

with a real player image appearing inside the window. Had the site been fully developed, a video clip of *Farewell My Concubine* would start playing.

The user can also click on the message boards link in the center of the dedicated movie page, not on the left. He is then taken to the *Farewell My Concubine* message board forum, `messageboards1.htm`. The user should then click on the “Something about Gong Li” thread. On the subsequent page (`messageboards2.htm`), the user could either reply to the thread starter, or go back to the forum page by clicking on the “OK” button at the bottom. If the user chooses to reply, he would be taken to the message composition page (`messageboards3.htm`). After writing something and submitting it, the user is taken back to the page for the “Something about Gong Li” thread (`messageboards4.htm`), except this time his user name (`wcpao`) appears as the last item under “Detail of the Thread.”

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Internet is an excellent vehicle for movie reviews and recommendations. Moviegoers can choose among dozens of film web sites and use their databases to search for reviews or obtain recommendations. The interactive features of the Internet permit movie lovers to voice their opinions by posting messages on numerous movie-oriented message boards. Some sites – such as Movie Lens (<http://movielens.umn.edu>) and Movie Critic (<http://www.moviecritic.com>) – even use the “collaborative filtering” technology – that is, asking a user to rate several films and then calculating recommendations for that user based on similar rating patterns provided by other users.

Nearly all of these movie web sites are dedicated to mainstream English-speaking Hollywood movies. Only three web sites focus on foreign-language films: ForeignFilms.com (<http://www.foreignfilms.com/>), Film Festivals.com (<http://www.filmfestivals.com>) and the Cannes International Film Festival web site (<http://www.festival-cannes.fr>). That is not to say, however, that other movie web sites do not review foreign films. All Movie Guide (<http://www.allmovie.com>), for example, reviews quite a few foreign movies, such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986, Hong Kong), *Jules and Jim* (1962, France), *Rashomon* (1951, Japan), and *Farewell My Concubine* (1993, China). The site’s focus, however, is still on mainstream American films.

From this analysis, it seems that the Internet lacks movie web sites that are dedicated entirely to foreign films. The lack of such sites does foreign film fans a

disservice. More diverse foreign films than ever are reaching the United States, and studies show that there is a U. S. market for foreign language films. Recent releases such as *Cinema Paradiso*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, and *Il Posino* all did well in the United States; *Like Water for Chocolate* even took in \$19 million in business (Hornaday, 1993). Taiwanese director Ang Lee's 2000 martial arts film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, surpassed *Life Is Beautiful* as the highest-grossing foreign-language film ever released in the United States (Major, 2001). The film won four Academy Awards, including Best Foreign Language Film, and was nominated for a record of ten.

Given the presence of a foreign film market in the United States and the lack of foreign film sites on the Internet, this thesis presents a design for a comprehensive foreign film review web site. To maximize the site's success, key design and business decisions are made in the following areas: (1) whether the collaborative filtering technology should be applied to the site, given the fact that the accuracy of such technology depends on the number of users; (2) what features will be on the site; (3) how will the site be marketed to target audience; and (4) a proposal for the site's economical viability. All of the decisions are based on research and market analysis, which provide insights into the foreign film audience's demographics (e.g. age, race, geographic location and profession) and its interests (e.g. favorite leisure activities and media outlets).

The thesis is divided into the following chapters. Chapter Two – Literature Review – discusses foreign films in general, reviews current movie sites on the Internet,

and describes demographic research results on the foreign film audience. Chapter Three – Methodology – explains how the foreign film review site is constructed. Chapter Four – Results/Requirements – presents a prototype of key site pages, discusses message boards issues and proposes a marketing strategy to launch the site to the public. Chapter Five – Discussion – discusses possible business models and issues that may arise had the site been fully developed and launched. Finally, Chapter Six – Conclusion – describes lessons learned during the project.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three parts. The first part discusses foreign films' historical importance to the United States, their influence, and their current status in the American cinema. The second part examines movie review web sites currently on the Internet and identifies the extent and depth to which foreign films are represented on these sites. This section also discusses the “collaborative filtering” technology that some of these sites use. The third part is the audience profile. It articulates the demographics and interests of the foreign film audience in the United States.

Foreign Films

Foreign films' popularity in the United States declined in the 1970s. However it appears this decline was due to industry and government regulations, rather than a diminishing market.

In the 1950s and 1960s, foreign films were very popular in the United States. It was a time when films made by such directors as Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, and Francois Truffaut were conversation pieces for weeks by people who went to see these movies. It was a time during which, to consider oneself cinematically literate, he or she had to be conversant in Bergman and Bertolucci, Godard and Fassbinder (Ansen, 1990). Film critic Richard Schickel recalls that in the 1950s:

“Almost every week something exciting was opening in the art houses. And not just in the major cities, either, but in places like

Madison, Wisconsin, where I was going to college. There was actually long lines outside the one theatre in Madison that specialized in foreign films” (1992, pp. 32-3).

Several factors were attributed to foreign films’ success in the United States during that period. One factor was the economic situation in the U.S. film industry in the decades of 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The Supreme Court’s 1948 decision on the *Paramount* case made foreign film competition in the United States easier. In *Paramount*, five of the major film producers were found to be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act and were required to separate the production and distribution of films from their exhibition. The decision also required that these companies, along with Columbia, Universal, and United Artists, discontinue the practice of “block booking” – or forcing exhibitors to accept first-run films with a block of low-budget B-grade films. As a result, the Hollywood majors no longer had a stranglehold on the market, forcing them to reduce their output of lower-quality films and to concentrate on big-budget products. The major film studios released an average of 247 films a year between 1953 and 1958 but an average of only 164 films a year between 1959 and 1969 (Ogan, 1990). The reduced number of Hollywood movies created a vacuum that was filled by imported films, which began to appear in first-run theaters and at the newly popular art houses. U.S. distributors offered distribution guarantees to foreign companies, paying them a percentage of expected box office revenues in return for the exclusive rights to distribute in the domestic market.

Another factor attributed to foreign films' early success is their aesthetic quality and content. Many Americans turned to films from abroad for more mature views of reality – i.e., sex – and they got what they were looking for. Some of the examples include Hedy Lamarr skinny-dipping in *Ecstasy* and Brigitte Bardot wearing as little as possible. American films were more sexually conservative. As one *New York Times* critic puts it, the audience preferred European films to seeing Doris Day kissing Rock Hudson good night after the tenth date (Ogan, 1990). But sex aside, foreign films had class. Americans saw the ideal of glamour in Brigitte Bardot, Sophia Loren and Jeanne Moreau (Corliss, 1997). Indeed, these films were the intellectual rage du jour of the day. They expanded the audiences' brains, challenged their pieties and changed the language of film (Ansen 1990). Foreign films reflected a whole new vision of filmmaking where content was not dictated by generic categories but by a director's personal vision of the world. Movies from *Grand Illusion* to *Rashomon*, from the Angry Young Men movies of Britain to the New Wave in France, and from the comic grace of Jacques Tati to the alienation of Antonioni, changed the way people looked at movies, at life, and at themselves ("The Whole Wide World," 1998).

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, foreign films underwent a decline and no longer created such buzz in the United States. Consider the following statistics:

- In the 1960s, foreign films captured 10% the North American market. As recently as 1986, the figure was 7%. In 1997 it was only 0.75% ("Shall We," 1997).

- Even with spillover grosses from the Italian hit *Il Postino*, 1994's foreign film earning amounted to less than 1% of the total U.S. box office (Corliss, 1997).
- During the 1960s, an average of 40 Italian movies were released in the U.S. every year. In 1989 there were two (Ansen, 1990).
- In 1988, according to statistics compiled by NATO, no top box office-grossing foreign films earned even nearly as much as the 50th-ranked U.S. picture. *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*, the French film at the top of the list, earned \$5.3 million in 1988, while *Trucker*, the 50th-ranked U.S. film, earned \$19.6 million (Ogan, 1990).

Moreover, the number of theaters willing to show foreign films also decreased. Tampa Bay, for example, has a total of 263 movie screens, but only two are firmly dedicated to showing foreign films (Persall, 2000). In fact, 1997 statistics shows that only 250 cinema screens out of a total of 30,000 in the United States and Canada were playing foreign films ("Shall We," 1997). Movie critic Richard Schickel laments:

“The steady shrinkage of screens devoted to current foreign films and revivals is obvious. They exist, for the most part, in a few big cities and university towns. Compared to the old days, this truncated market can handle only a relatively few, very obviously appealing movies” (1992, p. 33).

Even great cinema cities that Schickel suggests, such as New York, were not exempt to the reduction of theaters showing foreign films. In the early 1980s, more than ten single screen cinemas in the area around Manhattan's Lincoln Centre regularly

played foreign films. Most of them in 1997 had been closed or torn down, and the few that remained in service showed first-run Hollywood movies. The only exception was the Lincoln Plaza, but even this cinema house insisted that its selected films run for a minimum of 14 weeks, which often had the effect of shutting out imports from abroad (“Shall We,” 1997).

Nevertheless, the decline of foreign film theaters and box office revenues did not have much to do with a declining interest on the part of the U.S. audience – although American films’ increasingly sexual content and some foreign films’ declining quality did turn some audience from foreign films (Ogan, 1990). Michael Barker of Orion Classics – the most successful distributor of foreign films – cites the success of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* by Spanish director Pedro Almodovar, which took in \$7 million in the U.S. (Ansen, 1990). He also mentions the fact that the 1989 film *Chocolat* – a small, personal movie about French colonials in Africa – reached 350 to 400 cities and grossed nearly \$4 million, and that *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* and *Babette’s Feast* were seen in Missouri as well as in Manhattan (Ansen, 1990). *Europa, Europa*, meanwhile, grossed at least \$4.5 million and was expected to hit \$6 million before it went into home video (Biskind, 1992). Recent foreign films such as *Il Postino*, *Lamerica*, *Wild Reeds*, and *Les Miserables* were all critically acclaimed and generated much discussions in the U.S. (Young, 1996). “The market is better than ever,” Barker states (Ansen, 1990, p. 86).

In addition, films made by filmmakers from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are gaining popularity in the U.S. Chinese filmmaker Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* and Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* all did well in the U.S. (Hornaday, 1993). As mentioned earlier, Lee's 2000 film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* exceeded *Life Is Beautiful* as the greatest moneymaking foreign film ever released in the United States. In speaking of Chinese film, martial artist Jackie Chan's films must be mentioned. His film *Rumble in the Bronx*, directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Stanley Tong, took the top ranking in its first weekend of release in the U.S. The film opened in 1,500 theatres and generated more than \$10 million in revenue in its first two days, which was one and a half times as much as the amount the film took in during its five-week run in Hong Kong (Clemetson, 1996). Chan's easygoing and charming manner won the hearts of many moviegoers in U.S. "Believe me," says Los Angeles local Michael Perry. "This was no art-house crowd. Just a bunch of regular people like us" (Clemetson, 1996, p. 47). The popularity of Jackie Chan's films encouraged the studios to take more films from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, such as Ann Hui's *Summer Snow* and Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (Clemetson, 1996).

What, then, is the reason for foreign films' decline in the last three decades? Experts cite economic reasons. The changing economics of the movie business and the rising costs of marketing films have made it more difficult for foreign films to reach U.S. screens. When the major U.S. movie producers moved into the European market, they paid higher salaries to local actors and technicians. This resulted in increased

domestic European production costs that were passed on to the U.S. distributors, who were now less willing to risk a flop (Ogan, 1990). There were also increased costs for preparing a film for U.S. release, including the costs of subtitling and/or dubbing, publicity kits and critics previews, delicate booking terms with theaters and expensive media advertising (Ogan, 1990).

The decline in the number of theaters showing foreign films also has to do with the changing economics of the movie business. Theater chains want to make money by playing films that guarantee successful large-market runs or potential Oscar-driven revenues, rather than taking chances on anything with subtitles in it. Foreign films, therefore, are exiled to whatever downtown art houses that can schedule engagements. Time limitations and the economics of those specialty theaters also can work against foreign film releases (Persall, 2000).

Finally, the political climate in the United States contributed to foreign films' decline. Some politicians objected to imported films on political grounds. Ronald Reagan, while serving as the governor of California, called for legislation to stop the importation of foreign films in 1971. He was joined by then senator-elect John Tunney and the Hollywood film council in calling for tariffs on foreign-made imports as one solution to the 40-percent unemployment among union workers involved in U.S. film production (Ogan, 1990). Domestic film producers reportedly could get as much as 80 percent of their costs financed by subsidies in Britain, France, and Italy, a situation that led to what was termed "runaway production" (Ogan, 1990).

Examination of Current Film Review Sites

Twenty-one web sites that review movies and allow users to rate and recommend them were examined. The Internet, of course, has hundreds of movie sites, but not all of them provide movie reviews. Some of them, for example, report on the latest movie news, offer movie show times across the country and preview upcoming movies. The 21 web sites were selected after examining those hundreds of web sites and eliminating those that have nothing to do with movie reviews, criticism or recommendations. They are:

- 24framespersecond.com (<http://www.24framespersecond.com/>)
- All Movie Guide (<http://www.allmovie.com/>)
- Asian American Film (<http://www.asianamericanfilm.com/>)
- Cannes International Film Festival web site (<http://www.festival-cannes.fr/>)
- Check the Grid (<http://www.checkthegrid.com/>)
- Film.com (<http://www.film.com/>)
- Film Festivals.com (<http://www.filmfestivals.com/>)
- FlickPicks (<http://www.flickpicks.com/>)
- ForeignFilms.com (<http://www.foreignfilms.com/>)
- IFILM (<http://www.ifilm.com/>)
- The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>)
- JoBlo's Movie Emporium (<http://www.joblo.com/>)
- Movie Critic (<http://www.moviecritic.com/>)

- MovieLens (<http://movielens.umn.edu/>)
- Movie-Previews.com (<http://www.movie-previews.com/>)
- Movie Reviews and Criticism by James Berardinelli
(<http://moviereviews.colossus.net/>)
- Movie Reviews by Edwin Jahiel (<http://www.prairienet.org/ejahiel/>)
- MovieWeb (<http://movieweb.com/>)
- Popcorn.com (<http://www.popcorn.co.uk/>)
- Roger Ebert's reviews site (<http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert.html>)
- Screenit.com (<http://www.screenit.com/>)

Most of these sites have an American film focus. Sites like Movie-Previews.com, FlickPicks, Popcorn.com and 24framespersecond.com review almost exclusively recent American films such as *Cast Away* and *102 Dalmatians*. Foreign films are extremely rare on these sites. Even Popcorn.com, a British web site, reviews recent Hollywood movies such as *The Wedding Planner*, *The Watcher*, and *The House on Haunted Hill*. 24framespersecond.com, meanwhile, is unusual in that its reviews are written by users; however only a few foreign film reviews are submitted. Meanwhile, Edwin Jahiel, James Berardinelli and Roger Ebert's sites review quite a few foreign films, but American films are still the main focus.

In fact, out of the 21 sites, only three have a foreign film focus. They are ForeignFilms.com, Film Festival.com, and the Cannes International Film Festival web

site. The following is a description of each site, including a discussion of the size of database, the featured interactive technologies (such as message boards), the use of multimedia components (such as streaming audio and video), and the credibility of movie reviews.

ForeignFilms.com

This site is devoted entirely to foreign films. It claims to be “the best place to find foreign films on the web...and contains everything from classic foreign titles to the latest art house releases.” The site’s display of most requested films for the week of April 2, 2001, which included *8 ½* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, suggests that its database has a wide range of foreign films. A search performed on less famous Hong Kong films such as *Fallen Angels* and *A Better Tomorrow* produces results. In addition, the site has biographies on foreign film directors and actors such as John Woo and Chow Yun-Fat.

In terms of interactivity, there are several functions that allow users to participate. A user can, for example, write a plot summary for a movie. If the user feels the current plot summary is not satisfactory, he or she can write a better one and submit it. The user can also rate a film by assigning a number value to it – 1 equaling terrible and 10 being a masterpiece – and the average rating by all users is shown. Finally, the user can post a message to the site’s message boards. To write a plot summary and use the message boards, however, the user must be registered.

The site does not have a multimedia component. Nor does it offer professional reviews for films. The review posted for *A Better Tomorrow*, for example, are one-liners taken from newspapers, such as “a stylish, supercharged thriller” and “John Woo is arguably the best director of contemporary action films working anywhere.” There is nothing else but these one-liners. The plot summaries, written either by staff members or users, do not offer in-depth film analyses like those found in newspapers.

Film Festivals.com

This site is dedicated to films featured in major film festivals around the world. Though some American films appear on the site, Film Festivals.com’s focus is on films from around the world. For example, only one American film, *Wonder Boys*, appeared on the “Week’s Hot Films” page for the week of April 2, 2001. Other foreign films featured on that page were *Ali Zaoua*, *No Place to Go*, *Living Afterwards*, and *Murderous Maids*. The user can also see reviews of films that were entered in festivals around the world – Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Sundance, etc. The site’s Berlin International Film Festival page, for example, featured such films as *Italian for Beginners*, *Intimacy*, and *Le Fate Ignoranti*. However, the site’s database only contains foreign films that participated in recent film festivals. Thus, for example, a search performed on 1992’s *The Wedding Banquet* fails to produce results.

The site does not have too many interactive components. One interactive feature is online chats in which users can participate in live events with foreign film celebrities.

On April 11, 2001, for example, there was a live web event with Victoria, the director of Zoie Film Festival, and Leslie Ann Coles, the director of *In the Refrigerator*. Viewers could send questions to the guests either during the show or before the show. The guests took those questions during the show, and both the questions and the answers appeared online as the show went on. That is the main interactive component on Films Festivals.com. There is no rating systems or message boards for viewers to use.

The site has a multimedia component that plays film clips in streaming video, although the user can only see selected film clips. The site lacks, as in ForeignFilms.com's case, credible film reviews. The reviewers of *No Place to Go*, for example, are Caroline Buck and Ron Holloway, and that is all the information there is. The site does not present or explain Buck and Holloway's publication credentials for movie review expertise.

The Cannes International Film Festival Web Site

This is the official Cannes International Film Festival web site. It has reviews on films both in and out of the competition. Films out of competition are generally films by directors who have previously won awards at Cannes and therefore do not wish to enter their films in the competition again. For this year, these films include *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Brian De Palma's *Mission to Mars*. Those that are in competition this year include Aoyama Shinji's *Eureka*, The Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, Amos Gitai's *Kippur*, Ruy Guerra's *Estorvo*, and many others. The site has an

archive for previous award winners. For example, when a user clicks on the “Palme d’Or” award (that’s Cannes’ equivalent of the Best Picture Oscar) for 1975, he or she is taken to the page for the movie that won that year’s highest honor – *Chronique des années de braise*.

Again, the site does not offer credible film reviews. All it provides for each movie is a synopsis that does not really give insights into the method, the flaws or the significance of the film’s direction or writing. Another missing feature is interactivity. The only interactive feature on the site is a search engine that looks for films that have participated in the festival. The site uses streaming videos, but only for clips of the Cannes ceremony.

Collaborative Filtering

Two of the sites from the list, MovieLens and Movie Critic, use a technology known as collaborative filtering to recommend films to users. The technology recommends new interests for the user based on predictive relationships between the user and other participants of a community who share the user’s “characteristics” (O’Connor & Herlocker, 1999).

MovieLens (<http://movielens.umn.edu>), for example, asks the user upon first visiting the site to rate films that he or she has seen. The automated collaborative filtering system then matches the user with other participants, or “neighbors,” who have similar rating patterns. Chances are that the items that the neighbors have experienced

and rated highly would also be enjoyed by the user. Those items would then be recommended to the user.

Collaborative filtering, at its current stage of development, exhibits accuracy problems that make it difficult to use with small populations. A major obstacle is that the users have limited resources to experience items, causing the density of user ratings on items to decrease. This means that users who have similar tastes will not be matched unless they have rated the exact same items. Thus, for example, if one user likes the CNN weather page and another likes the MSNBC weather page, the two would not necessarily end up being nearest neighbors (Balabanovic & Shoham, 1997). This also means that the accuracy of a system based on collaborative filtering will increase as the number of people using it increases – the more people who use the system, the greater the chances are for finding close matches for any particular user.

Foreign Film Audience

A 1998 analysis of the foreign film audience in the United States shows that it is split half-and-half along gender lines. The analysis also reveals the following demographic characteristics of the majority of foreign film audience members:

- They are between the ages of 18 and 54, with average age between 35 and 37;
- They have obtained a college degree;
- They are full-time employees;

- They have white-collar jobs/professions;
- They are married with no children, or single;
- They are white;
- They are located in the South and West;
- They live in urban areas;
- They make more than \$30,000, with median household income at \$55,576.60;
- They either live in pairs, or share their residence with three to four people.

These conclusions are drawn from a study conducted by Simmons Market Research Bureau in 1998. It surveyed people who saw or would see art-house movies – either in theaters or through movie rental. The theater category was based on 1,544,000 respondents out of 12,421,000 surveys that were given out. The rental category was based on 1,792,000 responses to 17,322,000 surveys. The following is the detail of data findings.

	Theater films	Rented films
Male	50.1%	49.44%
Female	49.9%	50.56%
Age: 18-24	21.17%	22.81%
Age: 25-34	26.38%	26.66%
Age: 35-44	16.41%	21.62%
Age: 45-54	17.53%	19.77%
Age: 55-64	10.04%	6.53%
Age: 65+	8.47%	2.62%

	Theater films	Rented films
Median Age:	36.6	35.24
Graduated College:	38.35%	27.3%
Attended College:	23.84%	26.28%
Graduated High School	29.28%	34.46%
Did Not Graduate H.S.	8.54%	11.96%
Employed Full-time	61.46%	63.61%
Employed Part-time	12.52%	11.22%
Not Employed	26.02%	25.18%
Professional	16.27%	12.43%
Mgr./Adm.	13.55%	10.7%
Tech/Cler/Sales	20.72%	23.08%
Craft/Precision Prod.	6.32%	6.77%
Other Employed	17.13%	21.85%
Single	41.03%	34.01%
Married	44.05%	51.97%
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	14.92%	14.01%
Race: White	83.13%	88.35%
Race: Black	8.15%	7.49%
Race: Oriental/Asian	7.65%	3.23%
Race: Other	1.06%	0.92%
Region: Northeast	20.83%	21.93%
Region: Midwest	16.95%	20.23%
Region: South	25.36%	32.29%
Region: West	36.87%	25.55%
Locality Type: Metro	93.79%	85.03%
Locality Type: Non-Metro	6.21%	14.97%
HHI: \$60K+	45.27%	38.6%
HHI: \$50K+	55.96%	48.48%
HHI: \$40K+	68.95%	62.15%
HHI: \$30K+	79.68%	75.75%
Median HHI	\$55,576.60	\$48,847.90

	Theater films	Rented films
No. of People in HH: 1	12.58%	7.25%
No. of People in HH: 2	32.87%	29.55%
No. of People in HH: 3-4	40.38%	45.8%
No. of People in HH: 5+	14.16%	17.4%
No. of Children: None	69.8%	54.1%
Child(ren) Under 2 Yrs.	5.49%	6.84%
Children: 2-5 Yrs.	8.58%	13.7%
Children: 6-11 Yrs.	12.56%	19.17%
Children: 12-17 Yrs.	15.24%	24.39%

One word about the racial characteristics of the foreign film audience. This audience is somewhat reflective of the racial makeup of the United States. According to the 2000 Census, there are 75.1 percent of whites, 12.3 percent of blacks, and 3.6 percent of Asians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). This means that the 8.15 percent blacks and the 7.65 percent Asians who watched foreign films are indeed small numbers. These findings have significant repercussions, as the marketing strategy will be based on those numbers.

In addition to the above demographic information, Simmons provides information on the foreign film audience's preferred leisure activities, media outlets, computer usage, food, drinks, automobiles, and its other interests or habits. Below are some of the findings with regard to people who saw art-house films in theaters.

The foreign film audience goes out often but spends a lot of time independently (e.g. reading books and listening to music). Here are the top ten leisure activities enjoyed by the foreign film audience:

Dining out	68.42%
Listening to music	64.08%
Reading books	59.12%
Go to a beach/lake	49.49%
Cooking	43.49%
Card games	38.27%
Going to bars/nightclubs	36%
Outdoor flower gardening	33.99%
Board games	31.97%
Visit art museums	29.31%

The foreign film audience is not particularly interested in team or group sports.

Here are the top ten sports enjoyed by the foreign film audience:

Swimming	46.19%
Fitness walking/exercise walking	43.14%
Bowling	33.18%
Jogging/running	27.58%
Weight training – bar bells/dumbbells	26.3%
Billiards/pool	26.16%
Golf	25.65%
Hiking	21.48%
Camping trips	20.15%
Weight training – stationary machine	19.64%

The foreign film audience appears to be uninterested in becoming members of certain groups. Here are the top five organizations that the foreign film audience is affiliated with:

Church/Temple/Synagogue	19.64%
Art associations	10.55%
Health clubs	12.91%
American Association of Retired Persons	8.45%
Union	7.78%

The foreign film audience uses a number of Internet service providers. No ISP appears to dominate. America Online is the most often used ISP, having 13.19 percent of the foreign film audience.

The foreign film audience is not interested in using the Internet extensively when the 1998 survey was conducted. Bringing it to a web site may therefore be a challenging task. However the audience's Internet usage may have changed in the last three years, and further research is needed. Here are the top five computer uses by the foreign film audience:

Word processing	37.65%
Computer games	30.73%
Education	23.32%
Personal networking/Electronic mail	23.07%
Personal financial management	16.24%

The foreign film audience is not a particularly intellectual crowd as one might expect. The magazines that it most often reads – *News America FSI* – is a coupon marketing company, and it does not read established publications such as *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. Here are the newspapers and the top 15 magazines read by the foreign film audience:

Newspapers

<i>Daily newspapers</i>	71.3%
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	4.61%
<i>The New York Times</i>	3.89%

Magazines

<i>News America FSI</i>	66.92%
The Metro Puck Comics Network	57.6%
<i>Parade Magazine</i>	50.15%
<i>People</i>	28.54%
The Sunday Magazine Network	27.27%
<i>National Geographic</i>	25.01%
<i>Reader's Digest</i>	23.43%
<i>TV Guide</i>	21.89%
<i>Time</i>	21.55%
<i>USA Weekend</i>	20.1%
<i>Newsweek</i>	19.43%
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	18.02%
<i>Better Home and Gardens</i>	16.19%
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	12.22%
<i>Life</i>	11.84%

Although the foreign film audience says it likes to listen to music (64.08%), it apparently does not listen to music on radio often. Here are the top ten radio formats to which the foreign film audience listens:

News/Talk/Business/Sports	27.49%
New/Talk	24.19%
Adult contemporary	20.22%
Educational	18.61%
Album oriented rock (including modern rock)	17.89%
Country	16.09%
Alternative	12.79%
Golden oldies	12.33%
Album oriented rock (excluding modern rock)	11.21%
Classic rock	10.87%

Chapter Three: Methodology

The translation of the competitive web site and audience analysis of the literature review into a web site design and marketing strategy that address audience needs requires a systematic methodological approach. Like business analysis, designing a web site that serves a particular purpose starts with understanding users and their needs. The first step in this analysis includes determining if there is a market for the web site idea and if there is a gap in the web sites that are currently attempting to capture the market. The second step is to carefully analyze the competitive web sites and the demographics and interests of target audience.

The findings described in the literature review demonstrate that there is indeed a foreign film market in the United States. Many imported films have become hits in the United States, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Il Postino*, and *Life Is Beautiful*. Even though foreign films are not as glamorous and popular as they were 40 years ago, studies show that such decline has more to do with industry and government regulations rather than the audience's decreasing interests (Ogan, 1990). The research also finds the audience has distinctive demographics and interests that are helpful in designing web site features and sociability and in shaping a marketing strategy.

The literature review finds that current foreign film web sites lack one or more of these critical features. These include: (1) reviews from an established, credible sources; (2) a multimedia component, such as streaming audio and video, to allow users to view

film snippets; and (3) interactive capabilities to allow users to rate films, share their opinions and discuss films online. This proposed foreign film web site, therefore, fills these gaps and is designed to meet the needs of the target foreign film audience in the United States.

The third step in the development methodology is to define the required web site features in sufficient detail so that a prototype may be built and technologies for full implementation selected. This step involves translating analysis results into specific web site features. In this case, a foreign film web site basic functionality includes user interactivity, streaming video/audio, and credible reviews. The site, however, will not include a collaborative filtering function, despite its promise to help users personalize film preferences. While a U.S. foreign film market exists, it is still small compared to the mainstream American film market and thus does not guarantee the accuracy of the collaborative filtering technology. A less technologically sophisticated approach for user ratings is recommended.

Another technological consideration is the database and search engine technologies. Software (e.g. Cold Fusion, ASP, etc.) is needed to connect the database with the web site. This technology is not implemented in the prototype. After the prototype has been tested and refined for appropriate functionality and “look and feel,” this technology would be used to implement the production model. This production model would then be tested and refined before being launched. The first prototype site demonstrates the user experience – for example, how people can access and use online

discussions, read reviews and conduct searches for films. Each page is hand-coded using HTML, and images are created and/or enhanced by Photoshop.

The fourth step in the methodology is to develop an implementable marketing strategy. This strategy should be based upon several factors that include audience demographics and interests and available funding for marketing activities. Both offline and online marketing activities must support three major implementation efforts: (1) getting audience members to the web site for the first time; (2) getting them engaged in the web site quickly; and (3) keeping them coming back to build critical mass (Bruner, 2000). For this study, the realistic assumption was made that only limited funding would be available for marketing. A full description for the site's economic viability would normally be part of this methodology but is not within the scope of this particular project.

Everything described above – the design concept, the usability and sociability of the web site, and the marketing strategy – are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Results/Requirements

This chapter begins with an overview of the distinctive features of the web site, then addresses the design at a more detailed level. The design is supported with a non-functional “look and feel” prototype at <http://www.willampao.com/foreignfilms>. The chapter ends with a marketing strategy that may be used to promote the site to build its audience base.

Interactivity

Interactivity is key in web development. As Mohler and Duff put it:

“Effective web development is more than access to a computer, knowledge of HTML, or acquiring the latest multimedia software applications. The web is an interactive communication medium that is rapidly evolving and ever-changing to support what we need it to be” (2000, p. 33)

Indeed, the premise that makes the web unique is its nonlinear and non-sequential nature, which allows the user to interact with the content on a web site, rather than just read it linearly. The foreign film web site, therefore, has several interactive features allowing the user to interact with the site. The first is a rating system that allows the user to rate a film based on a one-to-five Likert-type scale, with one defined as “poor” and five being “excellent.” The rating mechanism is displayed on each dedicated movie page (for example, the *Life Is Beautiful* page), and the average rating

given by all users is shown. This way the user can get a sense of what other people think about the movie. In addition, the top user-rated five to ten films of a given week are promoted on the home page, so the rating function is more visible to the audience.

The second interactive feature is the message boards, which allow users to interact with each other by posting messages expressing their thoughts on certain movies. It's important to give users a forum to voice their opinions, since they cannot write a plot summary or review at this web site, which is reserved for credible and established film critics. Each dedicated movie page has a link to the discussion forum for that particular film. Some of the more interesting forums are also displayed on the home page to increase the message boards' visibility.

The third interactive feature is live online chats with foreign film celebrities or experts. Whether Ang Lee, Roberto Benigni or Chow Yun-fat, these guests help drive the site's traffic, as they have fans across the United States. The guests, meanwhile, can promote their latest films. The live show is promoted on the home page and e-newsletter that users can sign up for (this will be discussed in detail). The "Ask the Expert" link on the home page takes the user to the live online page. From there the user can participate in the live web event and submit questions.

Multimedia

Multimedia, or any informational presentation that includes text, graphics, sound, animation, and video, is one of the most promising attributes of today's web technology

and one that will undoubtedly be found on tomorrow's web in greater frequency. This is certainly true as faster connections and better compression become rapidly available (Mohler & Duff, 2000). The foreign film web site does not have complex multimedia features, as multimedia is effective only when used appropriately. Dumping an animation or audio/video on to a page – one that does not contribute to the content – wastes time and bandwidth. That said, the only appropriate multimedia function on the site should be streaming videos for film clips. For example, when viewing the page for *A Better Tomorrow*, the viewer is able to see a clip showing Mark, played by now internationally famous Hong Kong star Chow Yun-Fat, holding two guns and shooting crazily at his mobster enemies. When viewing the 8 ½ page, the viewer can see a clip of the famous dream sequence at the beginning of the film. The streaming video operates in the following manner. After clicking on the thumbnail image on each movie page (this will be discussed later), the viewer is presented with a popup window that shows streaming video using either the Real Player or the Window Media Player software. The reason for using a popup window in this case, and throughout the site, is that the user stays on the site. The popup window is designed to convenience the user as much as possible. For instance, the window does not appear half outside the screen so that the viewer has to drag it to a more central area on the screen. The viewer also has total control of the popup window. The menu bar, scroll bar, and maximize/minimize button are all present so that the viewer can adjust the popup.

The Review

The site does not allow users to write their own plot summaries or reviews, as is done by ForeignFilms.com. While some reviews written by audience members are quite good, most reviews and plot summaries submitted by users lack in-depth analyses on the critical aspects of a film – the direction, the screenplay, the performance, the cinematography, etc. For example, here is a plot summary for the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* written by a user of ForeignFilms.com at <http://www.foreignfilms.com/films/4210.asp>:

The fate of two women, both capable fighters, intertwine during the Ching Dynasty. One of them tries passionately to break free from the constraint society has placed upon her, even if it means giving up her aristocratic privileges for a life of crime and passion. The other, in her lifelong pursuit of justice and honor, only too late discovers the consequences of unfulfilled love. Their two destinies will lead them to a violent and astonishing showdown, in which each will make a surprising, climactic choice.

The text gives no insights into the direction of the film and the actors' performances. This foreign film web site therefore should use reviews written by established movie critics such as Roger Ebert of *The Chicago Sun Times*, A. O. Scott of *The New York Times*, or Desson Howe of *The Washington Post*. This proposal may be worked out through syndication, which is an emerging model for business in the Internet era (Werbach, 2000). The site could either negotiate syndication deals with those papers directly, or seek a content syndicator such as Screaming Media to avoid negotiating with

perhaps hundreds of content originators (Werbach, 2000). Users, meanwhile, are encouraged say whatever they wish on the message boards.

Text and Graphics

The language and graphics used on the site are selected in accordance with the market analysis on the foreign film audience. Since the majority of the audience is between the ages of 18 and 54, with most of it in the 25-34 age bracket, and since most of the audience has a college degree, the language used on the site is deep yet conversational. Simple sentences such as “*Crouching Tiger* rules” or “*In the Mood for Love* sucks,” as used by contemporary teens and pre-teens, are not acceptable. The graphics, similarly, conforms to the tastes of people between 18 and 54 – that is, they should not be too flashy, too hip-hop-*ish*, too animated, or too skateboard-riding punk-*ish*, yet at the same time not too conservative or too authority-*ish*. While Flash 5.0 may be used, it should not be overused. Rollovers and animated gifs are fine but are not necessary. Photoshop-created art should be quite acceptable and attractive.

Additional Features

The site has additional content such as reports on the latest gossip in the foreign film industry, nominations or winning of major awards by a foreign film, and the latest box-office figures for a particular foreign film. The site also has a factoid section on movie information and trivia. Among the items featured within this section are famous

foreign film director and actor biographies, quotes from famous movies, past Academy Awards winners for best foreign films, and top-grossing foreign films of all time in the United States.

Name of the Site and Logo Design

The name of the site is AllForeignFilms.com. This title reflects the content and purpose of the site – to be the complete foreign film source for fans – and at the same time does not conflict with domain names that are already registered.

ForeignFilms.com, ForeignMovies.com and ForeignMovie.com are all on the web now (ForeignMovies.com is a site that sells foreign film videotapes and DVDs.

ForeignMovie.com is still under construction). Moreover, AllForeignFilms.com should be easy to remember.

The current logo design consists of a blue-and-orange color system with a reduced saturation that reflects the color scheme of the entire site (this will be discussed later). As Figure 1 shows, the logo is designed using a minimalist approach.



Figure 1

In the logo, the name of the site is broken into two lines to emphasize the focus of the web site. Also this design leaves space in the page header. The right half of the page header is reserved for other information – an ad, for example. The filmstrip image

