

The Gauteng Film Office makes inroads into Brazil's film industry

Issued by [Cutting Edge](#)

17 Aug 2003

The Gauteng Film Office's recent mission to Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro represents the first South African film commission to make contact with the Brazilian Film and Television industry.

The Gauteng Film Office (GFO), an initiative of the Department of Finance and Economic Affairs, has just returned from a mission to Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. As part of the Provincial Trade and Investment delegation led by M.E.C Jabu Moloketi, the GFO represents the first South African film commission to ever make contact with the Brazilian Film and Television industry. In Brazil the GFO successfully initiated new opportunities and strategic partnerships for the Gauteng, and in turn the South African, film and television industry.

With their mandate being to promote Gauteng as a premier and ideal film location, the Brazil mission fell in line with one of the GFO's main aims - to find strategic partners on a global scale. The GFO met with, and was well received by, renowned exhibitors, producers, distributors, directors and festival co-ordinators. "This initiative into South America forms part of the Trade and Investment South to South strategy for the provincial government. Our participation in the delegation is a significant move in that the local film industry is being recognized by government as a focused growth sector," states CEO Themba Sibeko.

The highlight of the trip was the GFO's meeting with Ilda Santiago, Director of Rio do Brazil, the largest film festival in South America, which is held in Rio de Janeiro in September every year. A proposal is being tabled by the Festival that will focus on South Africa as part of celebration of 10 years of democracy, the GFO (in partnership with Rio do Brazil) will hold an exhibition at the September 2004 festival in Rio "to showcase 10 years of independent South African cinema".

The exhibition will encompass a cross-section of films, exploring the diversity and creativity which has been the spirit of South African cinema since '94. The GFO will also lobby for strategic South African film & TV partnerships in forming the delegation. Simultaneously, a Trade and Investment Forum is due to be held between the South African delegation (which will consist of filmmakers, producers, directors and the like) and their Brazilian counterparts.

The GFO will also be facilitating a documentary on Brazil in September this year, to be shot in Durban, Kwazulu Natal, by a Brazilian director, and facilitated in Gauteng. "Many people ask why we chose Brazil," says CEO Themba Sibeko, "And the answer is that countries like Brazil often get overlooked, while they actually have huge untapped markets that need to be explored. Brazil also has the largest population - approximately 90 Million - of African descendents outside of the African continent."

The GFO also focuses on developing networks on the African continent. Operations Manager Tonny Sauls attended the Zanzibar Film Festival in June 2003, which was a two-week festival, launched by the Dhow countries in celebration of the music, culture and film of Africa. Meetings were held with a variety of African-based Cultural organisations about forging ties, with the GFO stipulating that by connecting with neighbouring countries as well as those across the continent, it would build capacity for a Pan African Network of Cinema practitioners who want to link with South African filmmakers.

The current success of the GFO in finding strategic partners overseas and in positioning themselves as the gateway to the South African film community has not affected their dedication to the local industry. They are in the process of developing an online permit system "to minimise red tape", which will be launched soon. The GFO are also finalising negotiations with the Johannesburg Metro Police about the creation of a dedicated Special Film Unit. "It will put us on a par with places like Los Angeles and New York," says Sibeko, "and help us to address concerns about support services from the metros such as safety and security."

Editorial contact

Cutting Edge Marketing, Communications & Special Promotions

Tali Brauer

T: (011)784 7804

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