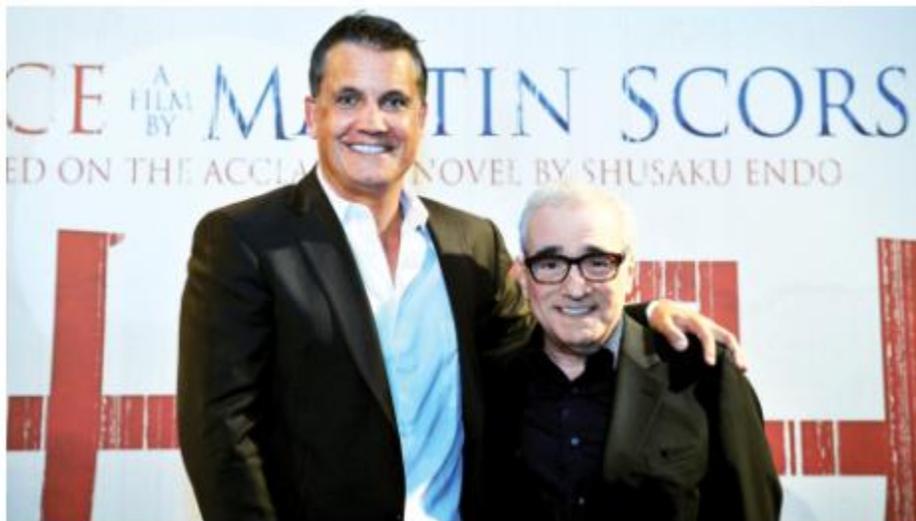


VARIETY

Ford's Focus is on Selling Scorsese's 'Silence' as He Drives IM Global

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IM Global topper Stuart Ford knows how to make a splash with Martin Scorsese: Put him on a boat.

The director mingled at one end of Emmett/Furla's yacht party on Thursday to promote "Silence," Scorsese's long-gestating passion project that IM Global is shopping at Cannes. Arguably the market's highest-profile title, Ford has been putting Scorsese's star power to work: The helmer spoke at a buyers-only presentation on Wednesday and has been hosting private Q&As with potential bidders.

Ford's intensely focused approach is indicative of what it's taken to make IM Global one of the most muscular sales agencies working today. "Silence" may lead to Ford's involvement in another Scorsese project, "The Irishman," in which Robert De Niro and Al Pacino are attached to star. There's chatter about IM Global shopping that pic, which may come out of turnaround at Paramount (Emmett/Furla has an option to finance).

IM Global shops about 10 titles annually, and has a 15-person team on the ground at Cannes this year.

“Because we tend to presell our films very very aggressively we’re (not) relying on generous forms of gap financing structures or financing structures,” Ford said.

But IM Global also has the added advantage of a deep-pocketed backer. Funded in large part by India’s Reliance Entertainment, the company typically invests in three \$20 million-to-\$40 million projects annually (although December’s release of the \$75 million “Walking With Dinosaurs 3D” will mark the company’s biggest project so far).

Other upcoming IM Global titles include horror pic “The Sacrament,” now in post-production; “Revenge of the Green Dragons,” which Scorsese is exec producing; and Catherine Hardwicke’s thriller “Plush.”

Having its own capital source gives IM Global leverage as more sales and production companies enter the indie space. Agents often want to see that there’s money behind a project before committing talent, for example, and more projects floating around Cannes doesn’t necessarily mean that significantly more films will be getting made than in years past.

“There may be more companies out there trying to put projects together (but) I think there is a hardcore nucleus to the companies that have been around for two to five years, at least,” Ford said. “It’s really about companies that can finance films ... I’d say, commonly, equity investors are looking for anywhere for between 15% and 20% preferred return on their capital and probably a 50% return on the net profits on the film.”

IM Global has also begun targeting around six projects under \$10 million after finding success with this year’s Open Road release “Haunted House,” which grossed \$60 million and cost \$2 million, according to Ford.

“We’re not doing more at the expense of the bigger movies,” Ford said. “We’re happy to up the ante.”

At Cannes, IM Global will also be focused on expanding its global footprint. The company launched a pan-Asian distribution arm last year and plans to open offices in Beijing soon.

“We couldn’t do that without the support and the substance of a big corporation,” Ford said.

As part of their agreement, IM Global shops some of Reliance’s Bollywood titles — films which both companies hope can reach a much broader audience beyond India. This year, for example, IM Global is selling Reliance’s actioner “Commando” and comedy “Besharam.”

But while Ford moonlights between screenings, meetings and working the Croisette for all of IM Global’s projects, “Silence” will remain one of the exec’s biggest focuses.

“Marty being on the Croisette selling his movie alongside me is something to look forward to,” Ford said.