

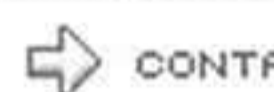
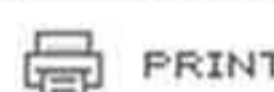
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WEEKLY: FILM

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Distributor rides rough Russian seas

Berlin's A Company labors on in wake of crisis

By ED MEZA

BERLIN -- As head of a Berlin-based distribution company focusing on Eastern Europe, Alexander van Duermen finds himself weathering a perfect storm fueled by the current financial crisis and deteriorating political relations between Russia and the West.

Van Duermen's A Company and its wholly owned subsidiary Eastern European Acquisition Pool (EEAP) are major distributors of films and TV series to Eastern European markets.

Russia, its largest market, has been hit particularly hard by the plummeting price of oil and gas, which has led to a loss of sponsors and lower acquisition budgets for TV broadcasters. In addition, increasingly chilly relations between Russia and the West following the country's recent conflict with neighboring Georgia have made already shellshocked banks even more jittery, making it that much more difficult to secure the occasional credit line.

Gala Media & Film Intl., wholly owned by A Company, handles distribution in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, something that became increasingly difficult following the Russian-Georgian conflict, when telecommunication and bank transactions were cut off between the countries.

Yet van Duermen is optimistic about getting through the current tempest.

In its five years of existence, A Company has carefully built up a network of reliable theatrical and television partners throughout Eastern Europe and in recent years amassed a large number of films, some two dozen still in the pipeline.

"We've built up a good cushion," van Duermen says.

The group holds rights to more than 250 films, including upcoming titles such as "[Zack and Miri Make a Porno](#)," "[The Reader](#)," "[Daybreakers](#)," "[Igor](#)," "[Saw V](#)," "[100 Feet](#)," Brazilian hit "[Elite Squad](#)" and TV series like Turner Network Television's heist skein "[Leverage](#)."

EEAP's distribution partners include [Lionsgate](#), the Weinstein Co., Lakeshore, Summit, Icon, Capitol, Odyssey and Voltage.

A Company and its subsidiaries have so far enjoyed a strong year, making more than \$12 million in TV sales in Russia and some \$6 million in Poland.

"We have the advantage of having a very diverse portfolio," van Duermen says. "We can mix a Martin Scorsese film with a high-quality TV movie. Channels find that more exciting than, say, a package of horror films."

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