

BLACK ENTERPRISE

Where To Invest Overseas

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Jeff Friday

CEO, Film Life • Age: 47

Friday learned early on that continuing to complain about how blacks were being shut out of Hollywood would only foster more frustration. He believed being a player in the motion picture industry would require not just talent—which he knew existed in abundance—but a plan, creativity, fortitude, and the right timing. They all converged for Friday when, in 1997, he, Warrington Hudlin (president of the Black Filmmakers Foundation), and Byron Lewis, (founder, chairman, and CEO of Uniworld) formed an alternative to the Sundance Film Festival, supporting independent Black filmmakers, particularly since he saw the studios as the biggest barriers to black stories in the movies. In five months, they introduced the Acapulco Black Film Festival in Mexico with financing from Lewis.

Since then, the organization, which today is the Film Life and HBO American Black Film Festival (ABFF), has grown into the premier showcase for black filmmakers. He has also developed it into a vehicle for film distribution; a platform for networking with producers, directors, and actors; and a stage for showcasing black talent. Through a variety of strategic partnerships with HBO, Lincoln, Warner Home Video, Wal-Mart, and TNT, Friday has launched a number of brand extensions including ABFF on Tour, a DVD series, and the Black Movie Awards. In 2007, Friday plans a feature film to be distributed by his company. His efforts have provided jobs, opportunities, and creative outlets for many aspiring talents in the industry. "The long-term goal is to be a relevant entertainment brand," Friday offers, "similar to Motown. They developed talent, made a lot of people rich, and became an international brand." —Sonia Alleyne



The Festival Guru