

HOW TO SET UP A *Drive-In Theater*

A STEP-BY-STEP
GUIDE

Drive-In Theaters Give Guests a Safe and Enjoyable Experience. This guide will show you all the steps to get up and running.

INTRODUCTION

Drive-in movie theaters have been around since as early as 1910, and over the last century, they've continued to serve as great entertainment venues for people who want a different movie-going experience.



More recently, [drive-in theaters have seen a resurgence in popularity](#). With movie theaters and stadiums closed because of COVID-19, many consumers are craving for entertainment that doesn't involve sitting in front of the TV at home.

Drive-in theaters provide the perfect fix because they allow guests to enjoy shows while still practicing social distancing.

Even more good news: some experts are predicting that the popularity of drive-ins will continue even after the pandemic, so even if you're reading this in a post-COVID-19 world, there's a good chance that these theaters are still going strong.

This guide will walk you through some of the steps you should take to successfully set up a drive-in theater. If you're looking to get into the industry, you'll want to follow the pointers outlined below.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE, GET YOUR BUSINESS AND LEGAL DUCKS IN A ROW

Just like with any business, establishing a drive-in movie theater requires you to set up the necessary business structure and obtain the right permits. We're not going to get into detail about these things, as regulations and requirements will vary from one location to another.

That said, once you've done the legwork in setting up your business, here are things you need to do to get your drive-in cinema up and running.



CHAPTER 1

Find the right location

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If repurposing a previous drive-in isn't an option, and you have the budget for it, you can settle on a fresh piece of land. Just make sure to:

- Find land with the right size. According to the [United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association](#) (UDITOA), around 10-14 acres of land is required for a 500 car drive-in.
- Find a location that isn't too close to indoor theaters. Film companies usually prefer large indoor cinemas when deciding on who plays the first run of their films, so you'll fare better if you're not located too close to these theaters.
- Set up your drive-in theater in a place that's populated with your target market (i.e., families and the elderly).
- Have the right lighting. Too much ambient light isn't ideal for a drive-in theater.
- Comply with zoning laws and other regulations.
- Comply with safety, handicap laws, etc.

CHAPTER 2

Set up your cinema equipment

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Set up your cinema equipment

Your cinema equipment would be your next biggest expense right after real estate costs. You need to invest in screens and projectors, and you'll need to ensure that they're set up properly.

Some of the devices and apparatus that you need to have include:

- ☐ Screen
- ☐ Projector
- ☐ Splicer
- ☐ Lamphouse
- ☐ Xenon bulbs
- ☐ Platter
- ☐ Rewind bench
- ☐ Splicer
- ☐ FM transmitter
- ☐ Sound processor

There's no one-size-fits-all equipment for all types of theaters, as your requirements will vary depending on your location. For example, certain jurisdictions may require your screens to meet specific standards for wind resistance.

It's best to consult with a professional cinema equipment company or a local engineer to make sure that you get this right.

It can be a huge investment, and one way to save on costs is to purchase used equipment from a closed drive-in theater. Another option is to rent your equipment. Vendors such as [FunFlicks](#), for example, can rent out a package consisting of a cinema screen, projector, sound systems, FM transmitters, cables, and generators for the following (approximate) prices:

- \$799+ for a 26' Drive-In Theatre
- \$1199+ for a 32' Drive-In Event
- \$1999+ for a 40' Drive-In Cinema Event

Just remember that these are nightly rates, which means costs will add up if you're having several movie nights per week.

If you're not the type to rent or buy used, you can purchase new projectors and other devices, and have a professional cinema equipment company construct your screens.

Obviously, renting or purchasing used screens and equipment will be easier on your bank account. On the other hand, buying or building new equipment will give you a higher level of control, and you can be more assured of the quality of the cinema equipment.

In terms of costs, the price of your screen could be around \$2,000 to well over \$10,000, though you will likely find much cheaper options especially if you're buying used equipment. Setting up your booth will cost around \$20,000, according to the UDITOA.

The best route depends on your budget and needs, so be sure to seriously consider all these factors when making a decision.

CHAPTER 3

Book films for your theater

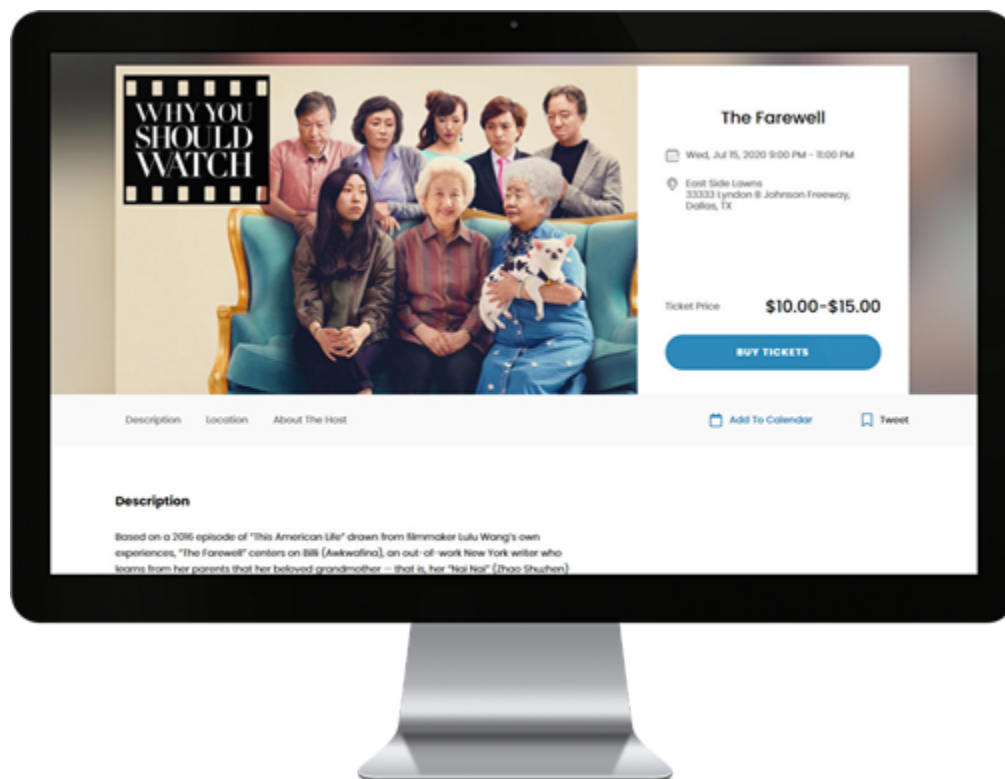
Your cinema equipment would be your next biggest expense right after real estate costs.

Book films for your theater

Booking films for your theater can be a gargantuan process. You'll need to build relationships and chase down film distributors, which can take a tremendous amount of time. It's not something you want to take on yourself, especially if you're just starting out.

Plus, you'll likely be busy with establishing and running your theater, so it's best to assign the task to professional movie booking agents. They will negotiate a contract with film distributors on your behalf and will work with distributors to determine the right box office sales split as well as the amount of time that you can screen each film.

Take some time to find the right film booker for your drive-in theater. Your booking agent should have established relationships with distributors and must be able to advocate for your cinema. They should also have a knack for selecting the right movies. Having ample knowledge of your market as well as a solid handle on upcoming movies are a must.



CHAPTER 4

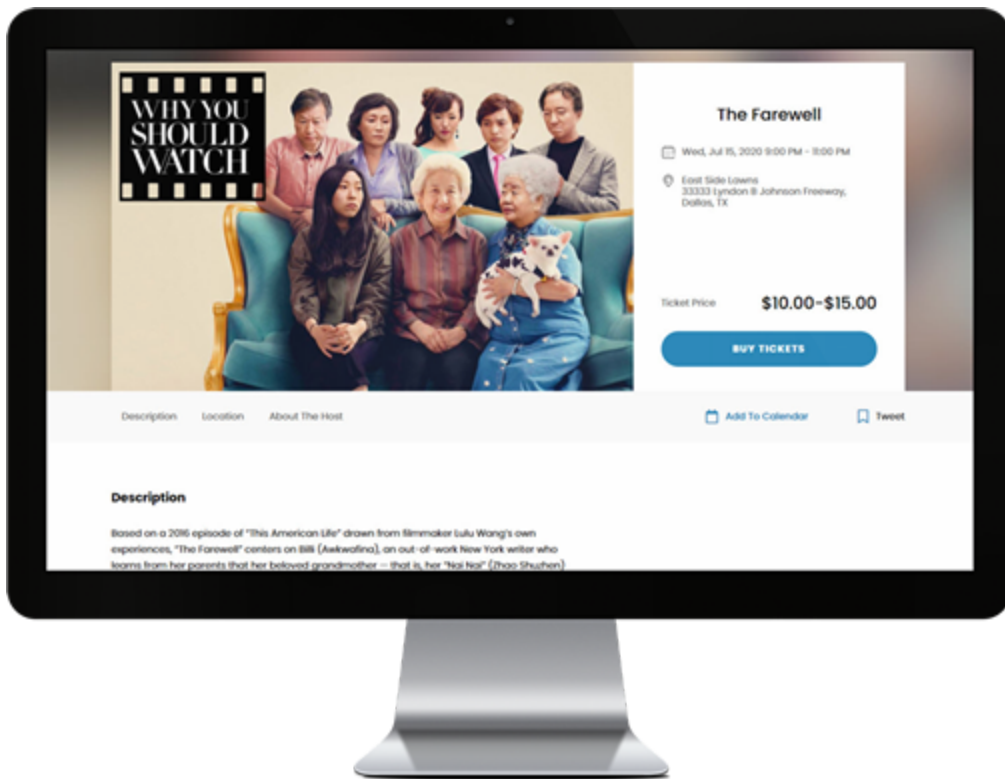
Set up your ticketing system

Now let's talk about how you can generate sales from the great movies that your theater has booked. You should allow your customers to purchase tickets in the most convenient way possible, so opt for a ticketing system that lets you sell tickets on multiple channels (i.e., online and offline).

SimpleTix, a leading ticketing app for drive-in theaters, offers a great solution for this. Let's look at some of the software's key capabilities:

Sell tickets online

SimpleTix enables you to build a fully branded ticketing page where people can select the movies they'd like to watch, view available dates and times, and even select their parking spots. You can also take payments on your ticketing portal, and once a transaction goes through, SimpleTix automatically sends confirmation emails to your guests.



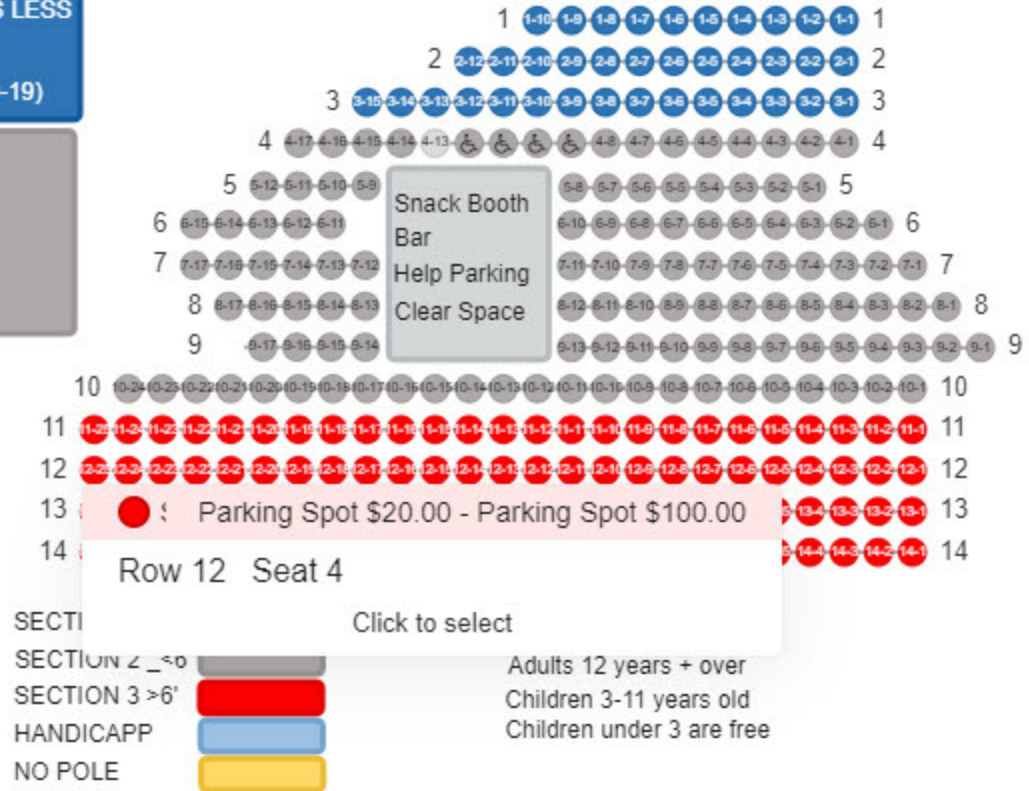


SECTION 1 HEIGHT OF VEHICLE IS LESS THAN 5 FEET

ROWS 1-3 (30 spaces during COVID-19)

SECTION 2 HEIGHT OF VEHICLE IS BETWEEN 5' AND 6' ROWS 4-10 (110 spaces during COVID-19)

SECTION 3 HEIGHT OF VEHICLE IS TALLER THAN 6' ROWS 11-14 (101 spaces during COVID-19)



Quickly build a parking map

Give your guests the ability to select their own parking spots. To enable this, the SimpleTix team can build a parking map that's tailored for your theater. We can even configure your map to position larger vehicles at the back to ensure that they don't obstruct the view of your guests in smaller cars.

Send reminders and notifications

SimpleTix takes the work out of notifying and reminding your customers about important theater information. Once a moviegoer completes a purchase, SimpleTix automatically sends them their e-ticket and reminds them of their upcoming show.

< Email attendees 5/30/2020 @ 8:00 PM - 5/30/2020 @ 10:00 PM • 5 attendees Send email

Send an email to your attendees:

SUBJECT

eTickets for tonight's showing of Jumanji

INCLUDE ETICKETS?

☒

MESSAGE

B I U

Hello {FIRST-NAME},

Just a friendly reminder to arrive at 7pm, this is 1 hour before the movie starts.

Please have the eTicket QR code ready for scanning and have the phone's brightness at 100%.

Insert : First Name | Last Name | Email | Phone | City | State | Postal Code

You can also use these messages to send important information. For example, if you're scanning mobile tickets, your guests need to turn up the brightness on their smartphones. Use SimpleTix's messaging capabilities to make guests aware of these things.

Connect with guests after the show

Keeping in touch with your customers is a must if you want to generate repeat visits and sales.

Engage viewers after the event by sending relevant follow-up emails. You could, for example, ask people to fill out a survey so you can improve your drive-in theater. You can also send them information about upcoming events and entice them purchase in the future.

GENERAL

Dashboard

Event Details

Event Times

Attendee Questions

ORDERS

Order Management

Attendee Management

Print Badges

PROMOTE

Social

Embed

< Email attendees






Send email

Send an email to your attendees:

SUBJECT

Reminder for Virtual Sales Sprint

MESSAGE

B *I* U     

Hello {FIRST-NAME},

Just a reminder about tomorrow's live webinar.
Be sure to [download and install Zoom](#) on your device ahead of the 10am start time.

Insert : [First Name](#) | [Last Name](#) | [Email](#) | [Phone](#) | [City](#) | [State](#) | [Postal Code](#)

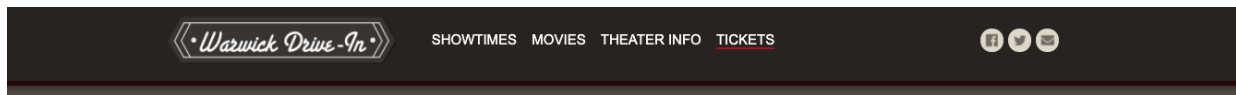
CHAPTER 5


Integrate your merchant account


SimpleTix + Square = Get instant payments!

5. Integrate your merchant account

Having the right merchant account is critical to processing ticket sales successfully. For best results, integrate your payment processor with your ticketing software. Doing so will ensure that sales data flows seamlessly from one system to the next, and your customers have a smooth purchasing experience.



[<](#) Secure Checkout 

 Billing Information

FIRST NAME

LAST NAME


EMAIL ADDRESS

CREDIT CARD NUMBER

POSTAL CODE

CARD SECURITY CODE

EXPIRATION MONTH EXPIRATION YEAR

 Billing Address

ADDRESS

POSTAL CODE

The integration process will vary, depending on your merchant account and ticketing system. Here's a look at how SimpleTix works with Square, to give you a better understanding of the integration procedure.

1. Sign into your SimpleTix account.
2. Go to the Setting page.
3. Select Square from the list of payment providers.
4. Click the connect with Square button.
5. Select the location you would like your SimpleTix orders to be tagged with.
6. Establish your ticket scanning process.

CHAPTER 6

Establish your scanning process

It's nearly showtime and it's time to welcome moviegoers into your drive-in theater.

Make it easy for customers to retrieve their tickets

Customers may not always have their tickets on-hand. Sometimes people forget to bring the print-out. Other times, they may have deleted your emails accidentally. You can prepare for these mishaps by giving your customers the ability to easily retrieve their tickets when necessary

SimpleTix, for example, lets moviegoers receive their tickets via SMS. All they have to do is text "tix" to a particular number and their tickets will be sent to them.

Set up signs reminding people about important details

To streamline the admissions process, set up signage at the entrance of your drive-in theater to remind guests about certain details. As mentioned above, you want people to increase the brightness of their devices, so you may want to create signs prompting them to do so.

Another idea is to set up signs for people who don't have their tickets handy. You could, for instance, write something along the lines of..."Forgot your ticket? Text "tix" to 833-985-1300 and we'll send them to you!"

Color-code your tickets

If you have a multi-screen drive-in and are showing two different shows simultaneously, you'll want to color-code your tickets so that your staff can easily direct people to the right place. For example, those who came to see Movie A will have a blue ticket and should turn right, while those watching Movie B will have a green ticket and should turn left.

Come up with a color-coding system that works for your drive-in theater and go from there.

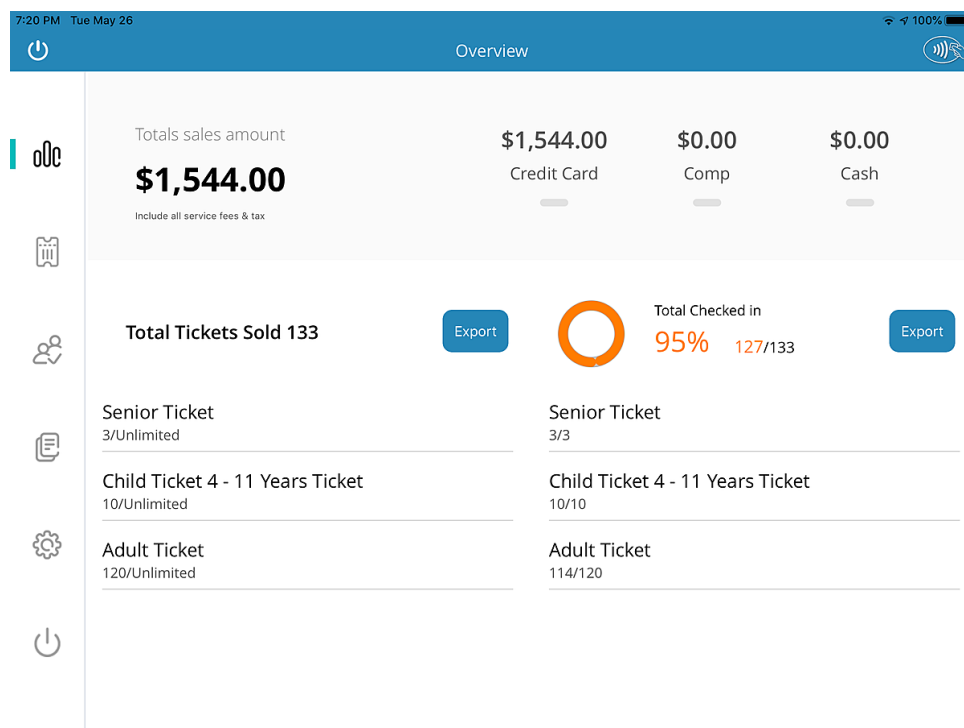
Keep the line moving by having just one QR code for multiple moviegoers

Scanning multiple tickets from one vehicle can cause a traffic jam in your theater. With SimpleTix, this becomes a non-issue thanks to the software's capability to scan multiple tickets from one QR code.



Keep count of the cars you're admitting

Always have a real-time count of the cars you've admitted to maximize the efficiency of your staff. For instance, once 90% of the tickets have been scanned, you can start re-assigning your employees so they can handle other tasks.



CHAPTER 7

Additional tips for running a successful drive-in theater

Running a drive-in theater takes lots of time and money. In order for your investments to pay off, you'll need to drive as much traffic and sales as possible, while keeping your operations efficient.

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Running a drive-in theater takes lots of time and money. In order for your investments to pay off, you'll need to drive as much traffic and sales as possible, while keeping your operations efficient.

Here are some tips to help you do just that:

Get to know your market

Gaining a deep understanding of your audience will help you figure the direction of your business – from your marketing messages and promotional channels to the movies you run and items you sell.

That's why it's essential to do market research. Who are the people who live within the vicinity of your theater? How old are they? Are they family-oriented? What kinds of movies do they love? The answers to these questions will help you make smarter decisions in your business.

Maximize concession sales

Like other movie theaters, a significant chunk of your sales will come from the concession stand, so you'll want to encourage these sales as much as possible. You can do that by stocking up on crowd favorites (popcorn, soda, candy etc.) as well as creating unique items that people won't find anywhere else.

Try to come up with signature dishes for your concession stand and market them (along with other items) heavily.

Go beyond the movies

Your drive-in theater may be repurposed for other types of events, so be open to different opportunities. For example, some drive-in cinemas are being used for religious gatherings, graduation ceremonies, and more. Depending on your location and the circumstances, there may be an appetite for these types of events.

Arm yourself with the right tools

Time is money, so you want to keep your operations as efficient as possible. One of the best ways to do this is to use tools that can automate tedious tasks and eliminate extra admin work. One example? Your ticketing software. By using an app like SimpleTix, you can eliminate much of the hands-on work that comes with selling tickets, notifying customers, and sending reminders.

You just need to set up your online ticketing page, integrate your payment provider, and make sure your audience gets ahold of the link.

All that saves you and your team time, so you can focus less on the admin side of ticketing and devote more energy to running and growing your drive-in theater business.

Ready to get your show on the road? Arm your business with the best ticketing software for drive-in theaters – SimpleTix. Our app enables you to quickly build event pages, collect payments, and automatically assign parking spaces. And with features and services like color-coded tickets, custom parking map designs, and automated customer communications, we can help you create an amazing movie-going experience for your guests.

Get started for free today.

