

The background of the entire page is a photograph of rows of red theater seats. The seats are arranged in a perspective that recedes into the distance. Each seat has a black armrest with two cup holders. A large, solid black 'U' shape is superimposed at the top center of the image, partially overlapping the seats. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Annex 1
THE AUTHOR'S
PROFESSIONAL CAREER

FULL

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My name is Pere Sallent. I was born in the province of Barcelona, Spain, in 1961. I am a Catalan third-generation cinema exhibitor and I have always strived to improve the cinema experience. My career might be described by some as successful, but, as in almost all cases, this success is the result of a joint effort. I have simply been a catalyst for lots of people's hard work. To be precise, this success is all thanks to the efforts of the employees of the companies that I created, the professionals who worked with me, and the two generations of my family who preceded me.



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Starting with the movie theatre built by my grandfather in 1944 in Cerdanyola, Barcelona, my father built a modest chain of five single-screen cinemas in towns in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. They were small working-class towns that started growing in the 1960s, when the waves of migrants from another Spanish region, Andalusia, arrived in Catalonia in search of work and a better life.

The early days of my career coincided with one of the toughest challenges ever faced by the cinema sector in Spain: the video crisis of the 1980s. During this crisis, Spanish video rental stores offered their customers pirate copies of the latest releases under the counter. This was an absolute financial disaster for small cinemas because, in those days, movies did not reach smaller towns until they finished their lengthy runs in the big cities. The situation was unsustainable, with rental stores offering customers pirate versions of movies that we could not show until several months later. The fight for survival was so tough that my first major professional task, in 1982, was to close down almost all the single-screen cinemas that my father had built or run, and focus all my efforts on the remaining one in Cerdanyola. After getting my family into debt, I converted this cinema into a three-screen multiplex. Its popularity began to grow but it did not start to make a profit until three years after the refurbishment. Even then, these profits were very modest, because we still did not have access to the big releases. Nevertheless, my family supported me and did not blame me for the debt I had got them into, which would prove difficult to clear.

The leading international and Spanish chains began building big multiplexes in the larger towns around Cerdanyola. To survive in such a hostile landscape, I learned all kinds of guerrilla tactics, the only type of strategy that my budget could afford. Such tough beginnings ended up being a true gift, because adversity is the greatest teacher... if you survive. Over the course of those years, I learned to differentiate myself from competitors, discovered the enormous value of excellent service, and honed my knowledge and instinct with respect to policies on service, prices, differentiation and customer loyalty.



In 1990, I managed to convince a Major -just one- to let me show their new releases, in exchange for a commitment to convert the three-screen complex in Cerdanyola into an eight-screen multiplex. It was a bold gamble, as it depended on the assumption that the excellent results that this Major's movies generated would pave the way for me to persuade the other Majors to let me show their new releases too. Luckily, it all worked out. Now, the profits were good, and I was able to buy a big building adjoining the existing eight-screen multiplex and add three more rooms. Gradually, this also enabled me to renovate and improve all the rooms throughout the complex. At the same time as these changes, I became a shareholder in the construction of new multiplexes in larger towns, although my finances only allowed me to acquire small stakes. Despite not having much weight as a shareholder, I always strived to take part in the design, construction and management of the new multiplexes. I wanted to learn how to build them and, more importantly, I learned to enjoy this learning experience.

Having made it through the survival phase, I started to excel ahead of my rivals. I created a small team, surrounded myself with great external professionals, and focused all my efforts on improving the movie-going experience. Through a continuous learning process, each new multiplex benefitted from the innovations implemented and tested in its predecessors. I also made the most of my passion for travel to learn from cinemas in other countries. As such, we were one of the first cinemas in Spain to transform from a single-screen movie theatre into a multiplex, and among the first to embrace all types of innovations. For instance, we pioneered popping popcorn in front of the customers, installing cupholders in seat arms, designing rooms with stadium seating, gradually increasing the screen size in rooms, building a PLF (Premium Large Format) screen, and installing electronically adjustable reclining seats. Very slowly, these initiatives became widespread across Spain.

Gradually, I sold my minority stakes in the multiplexes that I had collaborated in. By combining the funds raised from these sales and the profits generated by the Cerdanyola multiplex, as well as taking out many loans, I began taking part in larger-scale investments. Eventually, in 2010, in the Splau shopping mall in Cornellà de Llobregat (Barcelona), I inaugurated the multiplex that would form the basis of "Building the Cinema of the Future". In this case, for the first time, I held an ample majority shareholding in a big top-class multiplex, enabling me to build and run it with freedom. It was not easy. The construction coincided with the final convulsions of the great global recession of 2008 and the Spanish real estate crisis. Against this backdrop, the main financing bank decided to reduce the loan that we were negotiating by half, right in the middle of the construction of the multiplex. To meet the payments, I was once again forced to get my family heavily into debt. True to form, they did not object or criticize me. However, despite this injection of funds, there was still not enough capital and I had to apply the guerrilla tactics that I had learned in my period of adversity to find ways to minimize the construction costs.

Nevertheless, I insisted on building and running this multiplex how I believed it should be done. After inaugurating the multiplex's 18 rooms and 2,200 seats, it managed to attract over a million customers in the second year. Four years later, it was possible to expand the multiplex with 10 more very small rooms, to reach a total of 28 rooms and 2,600 seats. Having paid back the loans and running at a handsome profit, we were able to correct any initial shortcomings caused by a lack of available capital. For instance, keeping costs down had forced us to launch the complex with second-hand seats and analogue projection equipment. We progressively went on fitting out the rooms with the top 4K projectors and the best immersive 3D sound available. By the time it reached cruising speed in 2019, the multiplex had already paid off its loans and exceeded 1.3 million movie-goers in a year, the record audience for any Spanish multiplex that year.

In February 2019, I sold all my stakes in multiplexes. My goals changed and my professional career as an exhibitor took a back seat. However, it seemed a shame not to take advantage of the gathered experience and I decided to write "Building the cinema of the future". The lessons learned over the course of so many years could be a useful source of insight for a new cinema exhibitor. It might help somebody improve the management of their cinemas or perhaps build and run better multiplexes. Maybe it will simply give readers the chance to reflect on and discuss our profession. When I started out, there was no such reference work drafted by other exhibitors. Nowadays, however, in an interconnected world, it is easy to share any knowledge. We do so via our website, thebestcinemas.com. We do not know whether it will seem presumptuous to think that anybody could be interested in our experience. We do know, however, that we learned to enjoy doing a good job and that we want to share our accumulated experience.

After bringing this stage to a close, it would be a source of great joy and pride if any exhibitor is able to take advantage of any of our advice to enhance the movie-going experience.

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 www.thebestcinemas.com