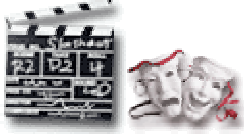


Studio Head Answers Your Questions About the Movie Business

Posted by Roblimo on Tue Jun 17, 2008 12:20 PM
from the Slashdot-goes-to-Hollywood dept.



You asked Larry Meistrich, head of NEHST Studios, how to get into the movie business. And he has answered your questions. So read his answers, then get off your lazy behind, pick up that digital cinema camera, and go to work!

1) *IANAMM*
by *Jarik_Tentsu*

As an amateur director and special effects editor, my work tends to be high in special effects and fancy stuff - muzzle flashes, lightsabers, explosions etc - all computer rendered. All look cool, but all of them look amateur. There's no way you can make something fancy like that look professionally done.

So my question is, if you want to make work to impress people in the industry, do they prefer simple things, done professionally, or things that have potential in being extravagant, but still have that 'amateur' feel?

A: My feeling is that simple and good always trumps extravagant and amateur. Many young filmmakers make the mistake of trying to do too much with too little. The best way to impress a producer or studio executive is to tell a story that has a credible beginning, middle, and conclusion. You never want to have to apologize or make excuses for your work and have someone have to look past the work to the potential.

My other question is how much are screenwriters/director's controlled by their sponsors/studios? How much freedom do they get in their movies?

It really depends on the studio or the production company. It also depends on the assignment. There is no simple answer to that question. The best way to have creative freedom is to find the funding yourself.

2) *Hi Larry ;-)*
by *circletimesquare*

Thanks for taking some questions.

The Internet has a number of plays out there for self-distribution and self-promotion. A lot of these avenues are relatively fresh, so it is hard to tell, but by your judgment, are there any self-promotion or self-distribution avenues that are absolutel y must-have for an indie movie maker? I'm thinking perhaps of things like the

Withoutabox system, or Massify.

I think that every filmmaker should have a web page that takes names and email addresses of the potential audiences. I think Withoutabox is a good service not familiar with Massify. Data is very important to indie filmmakers. Nothing is more important to a self distribution model.

Is it prudent to publish on YouTube before making any other distribution deals to get the word out? Or does this put you in an unattractive bargaining position with potential distributors, online or off, such that your content is already out there, even though in lo-res quality?

It is not prudent unless you are just publishing the trailer.

**3) *Is it possible to make a profit with union labor?*
by Anonymous Coward**

A: Yes. Union labor is often more experienced and gives you more bang for the buck.

The movie industry is notorious for being a heavily unionized, "closed shop" industry, with all the overhead and featherbedding that implies. Is it possible for an independent studio to make a profit while obeying Hollywood's labyrinth, payroll-padding union rules?

Yes. There is a big difference between the studio films and the independent films. If you are making films outside of the Hollywood system then you are making your own arrangements with the unions. I have found particularly on the east coast that the unions are very easy to deal with especially with the smaller films. Just call or go meet with them and be honest. They usually find a way to work with you.

**4) *Selling a Script*
by oskard**

How do you sell a script? I don't mean monetarily, but how does one pitch an idea for a script without getting it shot down?

A: There is no one answer to that. You can pitch to us through our website www.pitchnehst.com and we will give it a fair shot. One of the reasons we created this site was to give people outside of the system a chance to be heard. I do not know how to break into the industry at the Hollywood or Network TV systems these days. You need to find a way to network yourself into a position to be around people in the industry who can help you. The best advice I can give you is to make a short film and hit the festival circuit.

I have lots of ideas for screenplays, and I realize that the chance of anyone important

ever reading them is about a million to one. But even my best scripts sound like crap in an 'elevator pitch.' How does one work around this?

You don't. You NEED to be able to boil your ideas down to a sentence or two log line and brief synopsis. If they sound like crap they might just be that.

**5) *I just have one question*
by Opportunist**

How does Uwe Boll keep finding people to pump money into his trash?

I mean, let's be honest here. That guy didn't make a single movie worth the time it takes to watch it, let's not talk about money. His movies are invariably in every "worst. movies. ever." list there is. And even trash movie fans won't touch his junk with a ten foot pole.

Can anyone explain the miracle of where he gets his funding? I mean, if you can solve that mystery, it should be trivial to get money just the same way. I mean, people who are willing to pump money into a movie that you know will bomb might actually finance a movie that has a slim chance to be gold.

A: Wish I could give you an answer, but I just don't know

**6) *How not to sell the rights?*
by gnujoshua**

It seems that with independent film making, the common path is: 1) get small to medium budget, 2) produce movie, 3) show movie at film festival, 4) sell rights to big producer. Is there way to get your movie to "go big" without doing this fourth step and not starting with a big budget?

A: I would change step four to a distributor and not producer. You sell films to distributors not producers. Unless you are willing to invest the time and money to self distribute the film which requires a lot of man power and money then you have no chance of "going big."

7) *Getting a little camera time* by McFly69

For a person who is interested in the film industry, what is the best way to get a little camera time? In particular how does a person (in Boston, MA) find out where and when a movies are going to be recorded so they be a stand-in? Perhaps even interview for a small role? Thank you.

A: If you would like to get a little screen time with us, go to www.screentest.biz and register yourself as an extra. You will automatically be notified every time a role is posted that fits your profile. Other than that, check with your local film commission office. They will have a list of all the films, tv shows, and commercials shooting in

your area.

8) Documentaries?

by GeorgeK

Would making documentaries offer a superior risk/reward ratio compared to feature films, especially if someone is just starting out? What suggestions would you offer to succeed in documentaries?

A: I think the risk reward is about the same. That being said it is a really good time to be making documentaries. The best way to succeed is to pick a great subject matter and make a really good film. With docs you can do that for very little cost. Look at films such as Super Size Me, etc. If you have no experience with directing docs you should try to get an apprentice job in a cutting room for docs, which is a great way to learn.

9) Who would you trust with your first script?

by joe.terry

The question is ... do you go to the writers guild and pay them \$35 bucks or whatever, first? Do you go to an agent? If you have a killer script, that you can't film, where do you go first?

A: First copyright the film with the copyright office. If you go online search the term "Form PA" and follow the directions on how to copyright your film. It is not that simple to just get an agent. As self serving as it sounds if you really feel you have a killer script you should submit it to us at www.pitchnehst.com.

10) How's the biz changing?

by Marsala

It seems like the rest of the world is finally catching up to what we all envisioned would happen in 2000. Content producers like record and movie studios seem to have finally recognized the fact that folks want content delivered digitally and that customers are no longer willing to be chained to their TVs at a specific time, prefer to carry all of their music with them where ever they roam, and aren't necessarily interested in having to go to theaters to watch movies when they've got their own big screen setups at home.

Having listened to several directors explain parts of the movie biz in commentaries on DVDs, it sounds like the distributors are still holding on to opening weekend ticket sales as the primary metric for determining how well a movie performs financially. This, as a result, determines what movies they'll fund, which scripts they'll buy, etc.

Are things in chaos on the business side as consumers start to move away from the studios' primary metric, or are we not quite there yet? And what do you see the movie making landscape looking like if we ever do get there? Less big budget blockbuster CGI

extravaganzas in favor of more character driven movies?

A: You have hit it right on the head. The metric is going to change, and the choices of films are going to be very different. I also think the method, length, and subject matters of the films are going to change what gets made and where it shows. I do believe that the theatrical experience will not go away but will become more of an event marketing experience. So it depends on where and how you want to see your character driven movies.

<http://interviews.slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=08/06/17/1452255>