

## Writers get script-to-screen help

*Net sites help new screenwriters pitch their projects*

By Paul Bond

Hollywood is legendary in its ability to make things difficult for unproven screenwriters. So perhaps it's only natural that dozens if not hundreds of Internet sites sprang quickly to action to help struggling writers get their scripts read by the right people.

The problem now is in separating the useful online services from the useless ones.

"There's a lot of scams out there," said Chris Wehner, author of "Screenwriting on the Internet: Researching, Writing and Selling Your Script on the Web."

Wehner founded ScreenWritersUtopia.com in 1995 after discovering how hard it was to pitch scripts to Hollywood while living in Grand Junction, Colo.

"I optioned a script to a producer, then he died," he said. "So I wasn't having much luck."

Sympathetic budding screenwriters nationwide flocked to his site, and in 2001, he launched the Global Literary Market, where 400 people pay \$15 every six months so that their work might be perused online by 500 registered agents and producers.

Wehner acknowledges he entered a crowded space populated by the likes of Inktip.com, ScriptShark.com, ScriptPimp.com and HollywoodLitSales.com, which he calls four of the better online script services.

What should one look for when choosing a service? "If you can't get on the phone and talk to somebody, that's a warning sign," he said. Also, check out their "success stories," which are usually posted at their sites for all to see, and make sure they haven't changed ownership too often.

HollywoodLitSales founder Howard Meibach disagrees with the bit about the telephone. "I'd get calls at 3 in the morning, 'Hey, I got a great idea for a movie,'" he said.

His company lists scripts for free, and Sony-based production company Escape Artists gets right of first refusal.

"We're not in the business of selling dreams," said Rafi Gordon, president of Baseline/Film-tracker, the well-used entertainment industry database and analysis firm that owns ScriptShark.

ScriptShark boasts one of the more expensive services, charging \$155 per script plus a 10% finder fee if a script is sold, but its users get lots of extras for their money, including professional, written analysis.

Some of ScriptShark's cheaper competitors, however, "are taking advantage of screenwriters," Gordon said.

One way of determining which ones he might be referring to is by crashing the message boards about the subject, like the one at Script sales.com.

"(A producer) said I got ripped off and is going to do his best to shut them down," one person wrote about a specific service she used. "The page looks like it was put together by a 9-year-old," another wrote.

"Writers are incredibly frustrated, so it's tough to find positive comments on that site," ScriptPimp founder Chadwick Clough said. "Fortunately, though, they seem to like my company."

His firm offers an option similar to that of ScriptShark but for \$10 less and without the 10% fee. The company also has built a writers database of 1,170 agencies, management and production companies and any other entity that writers might like to pitch their work to, complete with tips on how best to submit a script and what genres and budgets companies are interested in.

Clough founded ScriptPimp after working at three production companies where, he said, "I found the query submission



Sara Rue, left, and Carly Pope in "This Time Around," which was made from a script discovered on the Internet, as was "How Did It Feel?" starring Natasha Gregson Wagner and Blair Underwood, below.

process to be archaic."

ScriptPimp doesn't post scripts at its own site; for that, it has enlisted the help of Inktip.

Headquartered in Glendale, staffed by four employees and founded in 2000, Inktip has been profitable for one year, founder and CEO Jerrol LeBaron said.

There are 4,000 scripts at Inktip, about 500 of which were written by already-produced writers, and the scripts may be searched for by using dozens of descriptive elements. Need a coming-of-age thriller about terrorism written by a guild member? The Inktip search engine will locate a half-dozen such scripts.

LeBaron's extensive list of successes consists of 200 scripts sold or optioned in three years. Users pay \$40 for six months at Inktip and are allowed to see who it is that is reading their scripts online, though only if they promise not to contact them.

"Writers deserve a paper trail as to what's happening with their work," LeBaron said.

"I was shocked at how fast it all came together," said Nathan Nipper, an Inktip customer who posted his script for "This Time Around" in October 2002, sold it for \$22,000, then watched the finished product on ABC Family in June.

Marvin Acuna of Acuna Entertainment signed five writers from Inktip, including Daniel Faraldo, who authored the Blair Underwood vehicle "How Did It Feel?" now in postproduction. "Inktip works because it allows me to consider writers I wouldn't have in the past," Acuna said.

